

THE PARTNERSHIP

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TO
LYDIA
WHEREVER SHE MAY BE FOUND

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THE PARTNERSHIP

I

TOLEFREE

I

"COME, children!" commanded Lydia in her high light tones. "Make a nice circle, and sing those last two verses again; then we'll go in."

The children, nothing loth to leave the biting air of the spring evening for the cosy warmth of the room which formed the headquarters of their troop, obeyed—those in uniform, with solemn and attentive faces; those newcomers who were not yet formally enrolled, with occasional bursts of childish laughter at the oddity of these novel proceedings. Scandalized by their own merriment, they held their heads down and tried to stifle it, but broke into irrepressible gigglings, tossing their slim torsos up and down, staggering back a few paces and putting their hands between their knees in the ecstacy of their enjoyment. At the sound of the childish voices ringing through the evening air two or three passers-by, on their way perhaps to some mournful errand in the neighbouring cemetery, perhaps to some clinching of

betrotthal in the wood-below, put their heads over the chequered wall to see what was going on. They stared curiously at the uniformed young woman who was giving other people's children ethical instruction with such a conscientious, not to say pedantic, air; then as their eyes passed on to the circle of giggling children, a sympathetic grin gradually spread over their features, and they nudged each other, whispering. Lydia, conscious of something obscurely hostile in their attitude to her, coloured and felt embarrassed, but broke bravely into the song with which she was trying to inculcate the virtues of early rising. The children obediently followed her, and after a few quivering, settled into the tune.

"This is the way we sleep too long," they sang, pillowing their charming young heads on their folded hands: "Sleep too long, sleep too long; this is the way we sleep too long, on a cold and frosty morning."

Tittering from the wall showed that this realistic treatment of a common human failing was highly appreciated. But this was the end of a verse; they then proceeded to indicate, in song and pantomime, the lively and punctual manner of their departure by all who were entitled to wear their uniforms; and finally, to show the élan with which the daily greeted the world, they joined hands and danced round in a ring.

"It's a very good thing to teach them like that," poked an elderly voice from the wall, approvingly.

A couple of younger voices tittered in reply, and somebody observed philosophically: "Well, rather her than me."

The song came to an end; the spectacle was over; the gazers by the wall passed on to their several destinies, and Lydia led the children into the school.

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Half an hour later, as Lydia passed her uncle's house on her way to her own home in that respectable private terrace, Cromwell Place, an imperative rapping on one of its side windows startled her from thoughts of the children she had just left. Looking up, she saw the expanse of fresh pink cheek, the mane of long white hair rolling smoothly back from a broad brow, the lively well-opened grey eyes, the full nose, the oratorical lips and the well-worn clerical attire which were familiar to her as comprising the external personality of her father. As usual, he was smiling that jovial, benign smile of his, which with its lurking hint of boyish malice gave a flavour to his mildest platitudes and had made him a man to be reckoned with in his circuit; and his plump white hands beat a humorous tattoo on the pane. Lydia waved to him, whereat he beckoned; without consulting her own inclinations—which were indeed sufficiently undecided—she dutifully turned at once into the short sandy drive of Boothroyd House, the large new residence which her twice-widowed uncle had

lately built himself in the vacant land at the end of Cromwell Place. Before she reached the house the door was opened to her, not by her uncle's eldest son, Wilfred, as she had half hoped, but by Wilfred's stepbrother, her cousin Eric Dyson. Eric, who was a rather overgrown and awkward lad of twenty, with thick light hair which hung over his forehead, prominent teeth, soft grey eyes, and a muddily complexion disfigured by a birthmark down one side of his face, gave her a cheery "hello" in response to her greeting, and without saying anything showed her familiarly into the dining-room.

In this large apartment, which had been recently re-decorated and upholstered in blue velvet regarded as of expense, the diffused radiance of several electric lamps of the last word of modernity combined successfully with the spring twilight, and showed the remains of a substantial cold supper on the long table. Herbert Dyson, Lydia's uncle and the owner of the house, a man in the fifties, with sandy hair and eyebrows just going grey, a rising moustache of a darker colour, and fierce red-rimmed grey eyes, sat on one side of the blazing fire, wearing excellent cloth and linen, and smoking a good cigar. Behind him Lydia's mother, Louise, knitted with her head full of dreary abstraction, her thick coils of hair ever crowning suitably the placidity of her calm, rather heavily moulded face. Lydia kissed her mother's forehead, and greeted her uncle, who nodded silently in reply.

"Well, Lydia," began her father in a tone of genial malice, advancing upon her from the window, "no doubt you wonder why we are supping here, instead of in the more frugal precincts of number seven."

Lydia sat down at the table and intimated, in her high pleasant voice, that such was indeed the case.

"The maid's grandmother," explained Mr. Mellor in the flowing rhythmic style which thirty years of pulpit oratory had made second nature to him, "—Am I right, love?" he broke off, addressing Louise—"Or was it her aunt? Some female ancestor, at any rate—I think; and she has had to go home to nurse her."

"Oh dear!" said Lydia, distressed. "Poor thing!"

"Poor thing, indeed! To my mind you're well rid of her," observed Mr. Dyson, drawing at his cigar. "She was an idle, sluttish piece of goods."

"I liked her," said Louise mildly.

"I dare say—you like such odd people, Louise," was her brother-in-law's contemptuous comment.

"Well, it takes all sorts to make a world," contended Louise.

"It's very awkward in any case that she should leave just now," said Lydia, frowning a little, "when I'm going away to-morrow. I suppose it was necessary for her to go at once?"

"Oh, yes! A telegram came," explained Mr. Mellor, "to command her instant return; Wilfred was in the house at the time, and he very kindly

offered to take her down to the station in the car."

"And he ha n't come back yet," put in Louise in her gentle tone. "I can't think what delays him."

"Oh, Wilfred'll be all right," said Mr. Dyson, rather dryly. "Nothing ever goes wrong with Wilfred."

"He's missed his supper," suggested Louise with a frown at the table.

"Trifling," said Mr. Dyson sharply at this, turning in his chair. "Give your cousin some rest."

Edith started sheepishly forward, and taking up the carving-knife unskilfully hacked some fragments from the joint. Lydia, watching him with an ever-outgoing smile, thought how like he was to the faded and enlarged photograph of his father which hung above his head—he had the same faint colouring, the same rather silly but appealing smile, the same moist and gentle gaze, the same drooping angle of nose and jaw, the same childish plumpness. It was odd, she noted, that he and Fred, being first cousins, were so utterly unlike; whereas she and Wilfred, who were no relation at all, might easily have been taken for brother and sister—both had come into the world with dark hair, brown eyes, high cheekbones, round rosy faces, and slender limbs. It was even more odd, to her mind, that she and her aunt's first cousin's face looked out from the same old-fashioned ostentatious frames in that

room alone, the portrait of Wilfred's mother—her uncle's first wife and therefore presumably his first love—was not to be found anywhere in the house. Perhaps Mr. Dyson cared too much for her to be able to look at misleading photographs, thought Lydia, dismissing the matter from her mind as she had done many times before. She thanked Eric for the plate of scraps he offered her, and tried to eat.

Her father could have enlightened her considerably on the subject of her uncle's first wife.

Thirty years ago the Reverend Charles Tolfree Mellor—son of that eminent Yorkshire Non-conformist divine, the Reverend Tolfree Mellor, whose work on the *Atonement* still crumbles on the theological shelves of all standard libraries—had accepted his first call to a certain chapel in the West Riding town of Hudley, and had brought his sister, Miss Fanny Tolfree Mellor, with him to keep his house and share his ministerial enthusiasms. At that time Herbert Dyson was an ambitious young working man with a good voice, who sang in the chapel choir, and attended all the educational classes and lectures within his reach with a kind of fierce acquisitive energy which struck the Reverend Charles very forcibly—so forcibly, indeed, that he became a devoted friend to Herbert, lent him books, invited him to the house, and introduced him to his sister. To Dyson, whose life had hitherto been rough and altogether lacking in social amenity, the genteel, if insipid, fairness of Fanny Mellor

seemed like the beauty of an angel, and as far above him; he fell deeply in love with her, and as Fanny proved willing to listen to his suit, announced to the not unsympathetic Charles his determination to make her his wife. Charles lent him a sum of money—the Reverend Tolefree had lately died—to begin a business of his own; Dyson plunged into the project with tremendous vigour, and it seemed as though the consummation of his hopes was sure if distant, when a deplorable scandal broke about his head. The Reverend Charles was visited one afternoon by a violent woman in a shawl, who stated emphatically that if Herbert Dyson meant to marry any woman, her daughter ought to be the one. The young minister, horrified, investigated the allegation at once; and when he found that Dyson could not deny it, he used all the force of his strong moral nature to urge his friend into marriage with the woman he had wronged. Poor Fanny, heart-broken, retracted her pledges at her mother's command and went away to live with her widowed mother. Even then Dyson offered a bold and stubborn resistance to the designs of his friend; but he was finally beaten by Charles's threat—for it amounted to that—to demand the immediate repayment of his loan if Dyson continued to live, as Charles said, in sin. This would have been so disastrous that Dyson gave up, and with the utmost bitterness and reluctance married Wilfred's mother a few weeks before the birth of their child. The ceremony was

the occasion of great rejoicing to Dyson's mother-in-law, who went about the Hudley public-houses announcing her pleasure and surprise in terms rendered more emphatic by her indulgence in the staple commodity of those places. From an obscure and complex impulse, composed partly of sentiment over his lost love, partly of ironic comment on his fortune, and partly of the desire to vex his wife—who, indeed, made an outrageous scene about it at the very font—Dyson gave the child "Tolfree" as his second name. This was, by no means pleasing to the Reverend Charles, for the name of Tolfree was of respectable antiquity in the Mellor family, being derived from that of a maternal grandmother whose portrait, in a frilled head-gear like a night-cap and a large severe brooch, always occupied the place of honour over the mantelpiece in his dining-room.

"You shouldn't have called the child by that name, Herbert," he told his friend emphatically when he heard of it, speaking in his customary full and resonant tones and looking him squarely in the face as he did so.

Herbert informed him with equally customary bluntness that the child was his own—or at least he'd been told so often enough—and he should call him what he liked. The two men glared angrily at each other, but in spite of everything remained friends.

Shortly after this Charles Mellor accepted a call in Darlington, and left Hudley; his undesired

wife, Wilfred's second name, and the interest on Charles's money, which he duly remitted quarterly, remained Dyson's only tangible mementoes of the Mellors. Nobody ever found any serious fault with Wilfred, and Dyson's business prospered exceedingly; but unfortunately the match arranged by Charles in the interests of morality was very far from being a happy one. Mrs. Dyson had inherited certain unfortunate maternal traits, which her husband's dislike and neglect intensified; so that towards the end of their brief married life it was rare for him to find her sober when he came home. When Wilfred was four years old she died, of pneumonia made fatal by her alcoholic excesses. In these four years old Mrs. Tolefree Mellor had died, and Charles had married the daughter of a highly respected art-master at Darlington. Fanny was thus left without any real home, and it was comparatively easy for Dyson to persuade her brother to allow an early marriage. As for Fanny herself, she had pined for her lover so consistently that she had fallen into what the previous generation would have called a decline; an access of spirit seemed to come to her with her marriage and installation in the neat newly furnished house which the prospering Dyson was able to provide; but this could not carry her through the perils of child-bearing, and at Eric's birth she died.

Dyson, thus for the second time embittered by the failure of his hopes, engaged a working housekeeper to look after the two children, and

devoted himself to his business, which, thanks to his ruthless determination, was quite extraordinarily successful. The Reverend Charles's loan, added to from time to time, became a very profitable investment, and the relations between the two families were happy, the two Dyson children making frequent visits to the Mellor household whenever the exigencies of a popular minister's life happened at the time to place Mr. Lydia—whose second name, following the tradition of the Mellor family, was also *Lucette*—and Wilfred had played together all over the map of northern England; Eric, being so much younger, sometimes remained at home on the plea of delicacy, the truth being that his father doted on him and could not bear him out of his sight. Wilfred admired all the Mellor mannerisms, and had been shaped by his uncle Charles's advice into a total abstainer and a very kind, steady, decent and likeable young man; so that while the fact that Wilfred, and not Eric, bore Fanny's name was now an intense exasperation to their father, to the Reverend Charles, who thought he saw an attachment growing between the holder of the name and his own only child, it seemed an instance where the will of God had ground exceeding small. The attachment was not, certainly, as visible to Lydia and Wilfred themselves as it was to the Reverend Charles; but if it was no bigger than a man's hand as yet, it was almost certainly on the horizon. When, therefore, a year or two ago, Mr. Mellor had had

a serious illness due to overwork, everything—his dividends, Dyson's urgings, Lydia's future, his brother-in-law's ownership of a vacant house in Cromwell Place adjoining his own newly built residence, Charles's own inclination—seemed to point to a retirement from active ministry, to a settlement in Hudley and a comparatively leisured life of lecturing, coaching backward youths for examinations, and taking occasional Sunday duty for his brother ministers in the neighbourhood. He had taken this step, and had not so far regretted it; Lydia had been fortunate in securing a post as secretary to the Principal of a neighbouring theological college; and the Mellors had by now settled down into their usual busy, well-regulated life of meetings, lectures, social work, and general usefulness. Needless to say, their elders' pasts were sealed books to the three members of the younger generation; Wilfred was a particularly loyal son and brother, and if Lydia occasionally ventured to criticize her uncle to herself, it was on the score of present roughnesses which offended her fastidious taste, rather than of past misdeeds.

"And what's all this mean, Lydia?" he was asking her now, indicating, with the hand which held his cigar, the straps and badges of her uniform.

Lydia explained her official position in relation to her troop of "Brownies."

At this her uncle said nothing, but the reflection

could be read in his face that in his heyday young women had had something better to think about than Brownies—or worse, as his brother-in-law would probably put it. He smiled a rather cynical smile which Lydia knew and disliked, and remained silent for a while, finishing his cigar. Mr. Dyson did not, as a matter of fact, admire his niece. Her figure seemed to him angular and bad, and she walked in quick short steps, which, when she was in a hurry—and she was almost always in a hurry—became a ridiculous fussy pattering which Mr. Dyson particularly detested in a woman. Then there was a deplorable absence of style in her toilets—her skirts were always too short or too long, too wide or too narrow, for the prevailing fashion—and what was worse, she seemed unconscious of it. She dressed her abundant dark hair badly, too, and the rather simple and conscientious expression of her face annoyed Mr. Dyson, while, like her father's, it commanded his unwilling respect. Various personal mannerisms of hers, too—her superior little smile, her soft careful enunciation, her silly habit of calling her mother by her Christian name—irritated the robust realism of Mr. Dyson's character. In a word, he thought Lydia old-maidish, and put it down to her unsuitable upbringing by her father, that absurdly inexperienced and unpractical, though lovable, Charles—Louise, of course, in Mr. Dyson's view, was a mere looker-on at life's game, a spectator who did not count. It was always a marvel to him that

Louise had surrendered her detachment sufficiently to marry and bear a child; and it corroborated his view of her that she seemed to have left no traces of herself in her daughter.

"It's a pity you don't smoke, Charles," he observed after these reflections, throwing the stub of his cigar into the glowing fire.

"It's a pity you do," riposted his brother-in-law immediately.

The two had sparred together thus for thirty years, and to do so now gave them a pleasant feeling of youth renewed and old times restored. The Reverend Charles laughed heartily, throwing back his silvery head; Mr. Dyson emitted a single sharp bark; Eric sniggered in his corner; the gentle Louise looked up from her knitting with an air of dreamy pleasure; and Lydia, not to be out of key with the rest, forced her lips into a prim little smile, though she felt obscurely irritated. Her uncle's attitude to life combined with that of the spectators by the schoolyard wall to wound and depress her; she remembered that she was tired and had a host of small duties to perform before she could leave early in the morning. Her face brightened, however, as she heard sounds of the Dyson car approaching the back gate and coming to rest in the garage.

"Ah, there's Wilfred," said her father comfortably. His gaze wandered to the table. "Now he can have his supper."

Eric, spurred to action, rose and recommenced his struggles with the joint. The back gate

clanged, there was a sound of whistling, and shortly afterwards Wilfred entered the room.

Neither of Herbert Dyson's sons had the forceful and determined personality which characterized their father, and though Wilfred had many good features and was a young man for whose moral energy it was impossible to feel anything but respect, he was neither handsome nor distinguished in appearance. His dark hair and fine dark eyes, his well-marked eyebrows and olive skin, his white teeth and well-knit figure, were suitable ingredients for a hero of romance; but they were irretrievably spoiled for that rôle by an expression of invincible homeliness and sound common sense. He had a wide but pleasing smile, which showed his gums too much but made one like the fellow, and he spoke in kindly, downright but decidedly Yorkshire tones. (Eric's accent was equally broad; it was in both cases the fruit of an upbringing conducted by housekeepers.)

"Good evening, everybody," he announced in an imitation of the wireless tone.

"Good evening, Wilfred," responded the Reverend Charles with sonorous urbanity.

"You've been a long time, Wilfred," said Mrs. Mellor with a self-accusing inflexion.

"That's all right, Aunt Louise," replied Wilfred cheerfully. "It's given me an appetite. I had to take her to Mirfield to get the connection—we'd missed it here."

"Did ye catch it?" asked his father in the detached tone he was wont to use to his elder son.

"Oh yes, easily," replied Wilfred. "Here! Get out of the way!" he pursued in a jovial brotherly tone to Eric, elbowing him aside and taking up the carving-knife. "I shall get nothing to eat till breakfast-time if you go on at that rate. What about Lydia? Some more, Lydia? Let me cut you just a little bit? There's a nice bit here."

Lydia, somewhat to her own surprise, discovered an appetite and accepted; and the two settled down to a cheerful meal.

"You haven't got the wireless on, father," commented Wilfred, passing Lydia the butter.

His father, who was no great lover of that form of entertainment, grunted non-committally.

"There's nothing special on to-night, is there?" he inquired sourly.

"Oh, I don't know," said Wilfred. "There's always something. Look at the programme, Eric. Would you like to have it on, Uncle Charles?"

"I should indeed," boomed Mr. Mellor with childish pleasure. His eyes sparkled, and he sat up eagerly. "Read out what it says in the book of words, Eric."

As Eric seemed to have difficulty in finding the proper page, his brother made a long arm and took the booklet from him.

"Don't let's have anything gloomy, Wilfred, even if it *is* a long way off," put in Mr. Dyson dryly.

"Now, father!" protested Wilfred between mouthfuls, turning over the pages. "You know

you're as keen as anybody about trying new stations."

His father exclaimed "Ha! Am I?" with an ironic intention, but offered no further protest as Wilfred, having selected a programme, made the necessary adjustments and flooded the room with sound.

"Splendid! Splendid!" cried the Reverend Charles enthusiastically, trying to beat time with one plump white hand. "Pity we didn't think of having it sooner, Herbert."

"Oh, we always need Wilfred to set us right," observed his father in a peculiar tone.

Mr. Mellor gave him a flashing look, but decided, as he had so often decided before, to ignore a sarcasm of which its victim seemed unconscious. He continued to smile benignly. Meanwhile Wilfred remarked to Lydia:

"In uniform, I see."

"Yes," said Lydia. Soothed by the appreciation in his tone, she described her evening's activities.

"And I hear you're off on holiday to-morrow," pursued Wilfred.

A little frown of worry appeared on Lydia's smooth brow, and she remarked that the maid's enforced departure was most inopportune at this particular moment. To leave her mother without help in the house was not by any means satisfactory to her, yet she saw no alternative.

"Couldn't you put off going for a day or two, till you've found someone else for Aunt Louise?" suggested Wilfred helpfully.

Lydia frowned a little more, and explained that the place she was going to made a very definite rule that visitors should arrive on Fridays only. Seeing the astonishment on Wilfred's face, she added hastily: "It's a kind of holiday home, you know."

"A holiday home!" exclaimed Wilfred in capital letters. "What are you going to a place like that for?"

He so obviously regarded holiday homes as the refuge of the indigent that Lydia blushed and explained that she was going there to help—in the organization of games and other such sociable activities, she supposed. She gave him further details of the place and described how it had come to her notice.

"It doesn't sound much like a holiday for you, to me," objected Wilfred. "You're too good, Lydia; always doing something for somebody else."

"Oh, I shall enjoy it thoroughly," protested the earnest Lydia. "I'm sure it's a splendid institution, and very well run."

Wilfred grunted incredulously. "What time do you leave in the morning?" he inquired.

"Seven fifteen," replied Lydia. "I have to leave early, you see, to catch a good train from London."

"I'll take you down to the station in the car," volunteered Wilfred.

"Oh, please don't bother," protested Lydia, distressed at the idea of anyone taking so much

trouble for her. "I can manage quite well in the tram."

"It's no bother," affirmed Wilfred with his usual matter-of-fact air. "I'll call for you at seven."

- The Reverend Charles had not overheard this simple conversation, for an Italian tenor's palpitating declaration of some passion or other was now throbbing on the air; but to see Lydia and Wilfred talking so intimately together was highly pleasurable to him. His glance noted with satisfaction Wilfred's downright and candid, if homely, air, and then softened into tenderness as it rested on his daughter's earnest brown eyes and the serious little pucker on her broad young brow. She wore her looped hat too far back on her head, and this somehow intensified the naïve simplicity and purity of her face. Mr. Mellor smiled benevolently, and his face took on exactly the same expression as the one he was admiring in his daughter. How nice, he thought, that they were both called Tolefree! Well, he had done his duty faithfully, at considerable cost to him and his, in that wretched business of Herbert's all those years ago, and now everything was working together for good. The quarterly cheque which his brother-in-law had given him shortly before Lydia's appearance crackled in his pocket, and he gazed upon the future with an eye of eager hopefulness.

The dusk had now completely fallen; and as the curtains were still undrawn and the lights within the room blazing, the night outside had

assumed a deep, romantic, glowing shade of blue, which seemed to press tangibly against the windows and beckon those within to come out and share all the most alluring and dramatic possibilities of life. The effect was rather as if a transformation scene had taken the company unawares and they had been transported *en bloc* into an enchanted land without their knowing anything about it; for none of the party had noticed the magic backcloth except Louise, whose mild gaze rested upon its splendour with that speculative appreciation so characteristic of her attitude to life. The rest of the party were too busy with their various schemes of life to observe it. If their thoughts could have been laid bare for inspection, it would have appeared as an interesting coincidence that while Dyson was thinking about his mill and Eric about his supper, those who bore the name of Tolefree were all concerned with the destinies of others. Charles was making plans for Lydia; Wilfred was arranging how to fit in that early train with a job at the mill he had promised his father to do first thing in the morning; while Lydia's thoughts were a mixture of Louise and the holiday home. Meanwhile the deepening night outside was leading them on to another day.

II

ENCOUNTER

I

By the time the long train backed into the station the platform was crowded, and Lydia felt hot, tired, dirty, and discouraged. It seemed already several days since Wilfred had put her into a compartment that morning. The early part of the journey had been fairly pleasant, but as she journeyed south the weather, which had been wintry and treacherous at home, passed with a bound to the suffocating warmth of spring, and Lydia's heavy fur-edged coat, from being a sensible and comforting precaution, became an intolerable—and shabby—nuisance. She had now stood for a large number of minutes beneath the huge glass dome of a London terminus, jostled by the continually increasing crowd of would-be passengers and clinging to a rather heavy suitcase; her figure drooped with fatigue and her courage was flagging. She positively blanched, as the train came in, at the thought of fighting her way to a seat; but as she had always prided herself on her efficiency in travel, she nerved herself to the effort and sprang into the moving train.

A seething crowd, as it seemed, surged into the carriage in her wake; there was a whirl of luggage being thrown into the rack, human bodies came into vigorous contact with her own shrinking form, and when the tide of porters receded, Lydia saw that the compartment was well-filled, and that her fellow-passengers were all women with the exception of a young soldier who had ousted her from her corner and was now bestowing various awkward parts of his equipment precariously in the rack above her head. Lydia glanced at him rather resentfully, for her fastidious nerves shrank from the prospect of human pressure on both sides throughout the journey; but she saw at once that he was innocent of any conscious offence, and with a faint sigh resigned herself to the inevitable. The soldier, however, had caught her look and misinterpreted it.

"If any of you ladies don't want me to travel in this compartment," he announced in a determined boyish tone to the carriage at large, "you say so now and I'll clear out. I don't want any misunderstanding about it; if any of you ladies think I'm not fit to travel with, you say so now."

Reassuring murmurs came from all sides, and one or two travellers cast severe glances on Lydia, who coloured and gave the lad beside her more than his fair share of room. He was not, however, so easily pacified; still standing, he embarked on a lengthy anecdote of how he and another soldier, both very respectable men, had once got into a compartment with some ladies

who had disapproved of their presence and said things to each other about it, and what he and the other soldier had said, and what the ladies had said, and how they had got out at the next station, and what they thought of ladies who thought like that about respectable men. As he interspersed all this with frequent injunctions to his present company to say so if they didn't want him to travel with them, he had not finished the recital of his wrongs when the ticket inspector appeared in the doorway. Sitting down abruptly, the lad dived into an inner recess of his uniform and produced a military pass, which he unfolded carefully with his thick fingers. He then became very helpful in the matter of handing the other passengers' tickets back and forth for inspection; and when one was dropped as it passed from hand to hand, fell on his knees and fished it out from amongst the welter of luggage stowed beneath the seat. The ticket belonged to a girl of about seventeen, sitting on the opposite side of the compartment, whose robust figure, merry blue eyes, and round rosy cheeks had already attracted Lydia's attention. She was execrably clothed in a rough brown coat much too small for her, which had a hole over one pocket; a white tam-o'-shanter, also much too small, poised itself unsuitably on her round head; her shoes were poor, and her large hands, which lay passively in her lap, bore no gloves. When her ticket was restored to her she smiled, revealing white and even teeth and curving her nice round cheeks attractively, but

said nothing. The soldier also fell suddenly and unaccountably silent; he threw himself back into his seat and gazed fixedly out of the window as though smitten by a sudden fit of shyness. He was a bonny lad; his cropped dark hair, grey-blue eyes, long dark lashes, and high cheekbones with a sprinkling of freckles upon them proclaimed him to Lydia's mind a Celt of some sort, and something caressing in his intonation supported this view.

Lydia took advantage of his temporary immobility to extend her cramped limbs, and began to recover her composure and look about her. Part of some kind of a sheathed weapon dangled from the rack between her head and its owner's; she glanced up at it in humorous alarm, and as she looked away met the merry glance of the girl opposite, who also appeared to appreciate the joke. Lydia smiled; the girl, too, gave her charming smile, then hastily averted her eyes and became solemn. The train began to move; it dragged itself out of the station and plodded wearily along beside immense iron girders between which occasional tantalizing glimpses of the sunlit river could be seen. The heat was overpowering, and an expression of fretfulness settled upon the faces of all the women in the compartment except the girl in the brown coat, whose face remained fresh and serene. After what seemed an interminable period of slow, bumping progression, the train at last gathered speed, and began to run swiftly through miles of dreary suburban back-

yards. Its motion sent gusts of fresh air flowing through the open windows of the compartment; the tension relaxed, and conversations sprang up sporadically.

"Hot, isn't it?" observed the soldier on an intimate note, turning to Lydia as though she were his best friend.

Lydia, taken aback by this sudden affability, agreed that it was, very.

The soldier promptly undid a button or two of his tunic, smiling boyishly the while at Lydia, as though it were an understood thing between them that she approved of this proceeding. He then demanded whether "any of you ladies" objected to smoking. A somewhat sour look crept over the faces of some of the ladies referred to, but no one liked to offer any objection; so the lad produced a packet of cigarettes and smoked two rapidly. He then put away the packet with a sigh, and looked about him for some other form of amusement. His eyes crossed those of the girl opposite, and he gazed at her silently for a few moments. The train was now flying through the fields and orchards of Kent in a south-easterly direction; it had stopped once or twice, but nobody in the compartment seemed inclined to get out and nobody was able to get in—several people looked in yearningly through the window, but the soldier repelled them all by an emphatic statement that the carriage was full, and the supporting glare of eight pairs of eyes convinced them that he was telling the truth—and this

continued association for purposes of defence seemed to unite the compartment into a kind of comradeship. All at once the soldier began to confide to Lydia, in a loud cheerful tone, the story of his life. He had run away from home twice, he said, before he was of the proper age, in order to enlist in the army. His brother was a sergeant-major in India; and he too meant to rise—yes! He meant to be an officer before he was done. He had taken this course of instruction and that course of instruction, and yet another, and come out well in them all; and now he was on his way to a south-coast seaport to take a course of musketry.

“You going there, miss?” he inquired of Lydia with kindly condescension.

Lydia admitted feebly that she was. She felt considerably embarrassed at being the recipient of his confidences, for her fellow-passengers had all fallen silent and were hanging intently on his tale, while affecting—as could be read in their expressions—to despise Lydia for listening to it. Lydia’s attempt to stem the flow of military reminiscence by cold and monosyllabic replies was unsuccessful; but she noticed that while the lad’s face was persistently turned to her his eyes roved, and began to suspect that the rosy-cheeked girl in the tam-o’-shanter was his real audience. As if to confirm her suspicion, the girl at this moment removed the article in question, revealing a smooth head of straight dark short hair. She was not a pretty girl, but there was such a merry,

friendly look about her round rosy face, and such calm serenity in the way she clasped the tam-o'-shanter to her knee with one substantial hand for ten miles or so without making the slightest movement, that Lydia could not but feel that the soldier was justified in his interest, though she disapproved of it on principle. He was now explaining to her—he seemed to regard her as a person totally ignorant of everything appertaining to the affairs of this world—the stripes on his sleeve, which he told her meant he was a corporal; he also showed her the gold badge and lettering across the end of his shoulder which indicated his regiment. He spelled out the letters to her one by one as though she could not read; and Lydia, who understood this little manœuvre perfectly, coloured and wished that fate had not placed her by his side—somebody else might have known better how to avoid being used as a stalking-horse. In spite of her irritation, however, she was a little disappointed to find that, if one could judge by the name of his regiment, her inconvenient neighbour belonged to Shakespeare's county and not to any Celtic land. When, therefore, he proceeded to relate that his home was really in the north of Ireland, Lydia's satisfaction at being right about his race overcame her prudence, and she exclaimed that she knew he was a Celt.

With a superior air the lad corrected her; he was not, he said, a native of Ireland, but of Wales.

Lydia smiled with an air as superior as his own, and prepared to reassume her reserve, but it was useless; her sign of interest had undone her, and a stream of more intimate biography was poured into her shrinking ears. Photographs were produced, showing the lad in mufti—which became him very well—reading a book on the edge of a moor. Lydia gave them a perfunctory inspection and prepared to return them; but the boy opined that some of the other ladies might care to see them, and she was obliged to pass them on. Every passenger felt called upon to make some kindly comment, except the girl in the brown coat, who looked at them in silence and smiled with her eyes cast down. The soldier's gaze never left her face while the photographs were under her inspection; when they were restored to him he put them away with a musing air in a pocket which buttoned, and was silent for a space. After a while, however, a large station gave him the opportunity of saying to Lydia that the last time he was there he had come to escort a fellow-soldier to the gaol. Lydia's expression of horror evidently pleased him, for he promptly embarked on details of various sad moral cases he had known in the past three years. The way some of them went on, it appeared, was terrible; but *he* made nothing of that line. No! *He* meant to get on, *he* did; he was going to be an officer before he was done. Lydia hoped that this return upon his original theme meant that his subject-matter was exhausted, and he certainly turned to the

window and gazed out upon the passing scenery as though such was the case. But against her will Lydia observed that his attention to the scenery was more pronounced when the train was passing some dark wood or bluff which made the window into a reflector; when the landscape was not thus helpful he jerked himself abruptly round and threw out to the alarmed Lydia some spicy anecdote or other which was often—perhaps fortunately—drowned in the roar of the train.

At length the little cosmos of the train approached Lydia's destination. The soldier resumed his equipment with a tremendous clanking, and all the women in the carriage fidgeted about their hand-luggage, with the exception of the girl in the brown coat. She put on her tam-o'-shanter, but seemed unconcerned as to luggage till the last moment, when she suddenly reached up to the rack above her head and took down a paper parcel—and not a very large one at that, as Lydia observed compassionately. The train drew up; for a few minutes there was a terrible hurly-burly of the kind Lydia most detested: she was buffeted about helplessly hither and thither, and had murmured "Foyle Tower" vainly into the ears of several heedless drivers before at last she found herself seated in a hot and crowded station bus which was said to pass the place she wanted. The bus throbbed impatiently; just as it was about to start the girl in the brown coat, looking serene and reserved as usual, was pushed in with helpful cries by the conductor, and

squeezed into the opposite seat. The soldier, Lydia was relieved to find, had disappeared.

Almost the first place the bus called at was the shore side of a large hotel, which seemed, judging from its white stone frontage and extensive gardens, a very pretentious place indeed. To Lydia's amazement the girl in the brown coat dismounted here. As she was wandering, irresolute but stolid, towards the entrance, she was intercepted by a uniformed porter, who with a lofty gesture waved her off towards a small side door. Lydia's heart smote her as she realized that the child—for she was little more—had come to form part of the extra staff which the hotel was taking on for Easter; and this poignant impression persisted even when, ten minutes later, she found herself within the decorous and orderly precincts of Foyle Tower, with a card of rules hanging by her bedroom door. The incidents of the afternoon lay hot and confused in her mind, like those of a disorderly dream; but they were extraordinarily vivid, too. That absurd soldier! That poor child with the hole in her coat! But surely, thought Lydia, as the influence of Foyle Tower began to assert its sway, surely that hole could have been mended.

2

The night was dark. Lydia paced the uneven asphalt of the front—out of which the winter storms yearly tore huge jagged pieces—and listened rather mournfully to the monotonous roll

of the sea on the pebbled shore. Various flashing beams from lighthouses in France, on Dungeness, at Dover, jewelled the sea at rhythmic intervals, but Lydia was not capable of deriving much solace from such sources. She was aware that the night air was warm and balmy, and that the scattered lights made a pretty scene, but this did not console her, as it would have done Louise, for the disappointments and disillusionments of the day. The holiday home, as a matter of fact, was not a great success so far, from Lydia's point of view. The young people there had rapidly arranged themselves into couples and did not want to be organized; the older people sat about placidly and did not seem to want to be organized either. Lydia had somehow not succeeded in attaching herself to either group; she felt lonely and unwanted, and heartily wished herself back home again, where the need for her, in the unavoidable absence of the maid, was genuine. She sighed a little, and stared rather blankly at the heaped pebbles and the sullen sea.

"Good evening," said a voice in her ear.

Lydia started; then, thinking the voice belonged to someone from the Tower—it certainly had a familiar ring—she replied distastefully: "Good evening." Immediately she reproached herself for her lack of cordiality, and turning towards the speaker to make it good, found that, as far as the dim and infrequent lights of the promenade permitted her to see, he appeared to be wearing a uniform of some kind. "Oh!" she exclaimed, taken aback.

"Beg pardon, miss," said the voice at once. "I thought you was somebody else."

The innocent Lydia accepted this at its face value, and said in her simple and candid tones: "It doesn't matter." She thought it necessary, however, to quicken her pace somewhat; and began to walk rapidly away along the promenade towards the Tower. Unfortunately the owner of the voice did not remain behind as Lydia intended he should, but kept pace with her fluttering steps, and edged her gradually out of the light towards the wall.

"You're in a great hurry," he said in a low voice, half-joking, half-caressing. "What are you in such a hurry for? You're in a great hurry, aren't you?" Lydia gave an inarticulate murmur and tried to walk faster. "Have you to be in by ten?" inquired the soldier sympathetically.

"In by ten!" exclaimed Lydia, startled out of her discretion. "Of course not."

"Well, that's good," said her companion with a satisfaction which alarmed Lydia. "It's a lovely night for a walk, isn't it?" As Lydia said nothing he pressed her: "Isn't it? What do you think? Eh?" Lydia's continued silence seemed to wound him, for he continued in an aggrieved tone: "Well, you might say *something* to me. You talked to me plenty in the train coming down. Didn't you now?"

Lydia, who had long since realized his identity, replied abruptly: "Yes."

Her curt and angry tone was meant to dis-

courage him, but it seemed to have the opposite effect, for he pursued eagerly: "Well, why shouldn't we have a little chat now? Eh? Why shouldn't we? I don't see why we shouldn't. I should like," he added in a wistful tone, "to have a little chat with you. I don't see why we shouldn't have a little chat."

Lydia, who had inherited some of the Reverend Charles's inconvenient humour, could not forbear the observation that he seemed to be having the chat he so urgently desired.

"You think I'm talking too much, eh?" said the soldier, appreciating the joke. "Well, *you* talk then. Can't you talk? I dare say you can talk well enough when you like. Most girls can talk," he announced, evidently intending to make a joke to match Lydia's. "Not that I like them when they talk too much," he added hastily. "There's reason in all things." As Lydia was silent, he pursued: "Well, it's a lovely night for a walk. What do you think?" He hesitated, then said boldly: "Will you come for a walk with me?"

"No," said Lydia with emphasis.

"Why not?" inquired the lad in a cheerful argumentative tone. "Why won't you? Eh? Do you think I'd run away with you? Do you?" He gave a soft snigger of pleasure at the thought.

"I'm sure you wouldn't," said Lydia with a scornful decision which she by no means felt. The lad's soft insistent voice, badgering her with preposterous questions, was introducing her to

sensations which were novel to her. She was new to the technique of this love-making of the streets, and it shook her more than she could have imagined possible.

"Why do you think I shouldn't?" teased the soldier in reply to her last remark. "You're very certain about it, aren't you? Why do you think I shouldn't run off with you? You must have some reason for saying that, you know."

"Please go away," said the hapless Lydia firmly.

"Oh, oh!" protested the soldier on a long-drawn-out note of plaintive amusement. "Don't say that, miss. Why won't you come for a walk with me? What harm is there in a walk? *I* don't see why you shouldn't come. Why won't you come?"

"I don't do that kind of thing," explained Lydia with as much dignity as she could command.

"Oh, well, of course," agreed the soldier with a large reassuring gesture. "Neither do I. But just for once——" He broke off abruptly and gazed into the darkness of an unpaved back lane which opened out beyond her. Lydia, following the direction of his glance, thought she saw a form vaguely sketched against some palings there; she strained her eyes to pierce the darkness, but the figure, if it was one, had gone.

"Well," said her companion in a changed tone, "are you quite sure you won't come for a walk with me?"

"Quite," replied Lydia emphatically, summoning all her moral force to her support.

"Then good night, and good luck to you," returned the soldier with courteous finality. He sketched a salute, turned on his heel, and vanished abruptly down the lane.

Lydia, thus left alone, was, of course, intensely relieved—as she told herself—by his departure; but somehow, too, a feeling of disappointment was in the air. Her heart had beaten pleurably fast during the last few moments. She reviewed the whole ridiculous episode with the superior smile which became a Tolefree Mellor; but somehow the lad's caressing voice, the sparkle of his merry eyes beneath the lamps, his charming smile, the Celtic manner of his attack, did not strike unpleasantly upon her recollection. With her hand upon the gate of Foyle Tower, Lydia decided that she did not wish, yet, to pass its austere portals; there was beauty, now, in the flashing lights; poetry in the sea's endless roll. She turned aside and made for a "shelter" of glass and wood which graced the front and gave upon the sea. When she was ensconced there in a windless corner, her conscience began to reproach her. Ought she not, most decidedly, to have withdrawn at once to the safety of Foyle Tower, after the recent disgraceful incident? Was she not inviting, by her presence there, a repetition of that incident? At this thought she started to her feet; and stood poised for flight, while obscure forces battled within her. If she should see him

again! What a terrible episode for the Reverend Charles Mellor's daughter to be involved in! Yet at the same time she could not but admit, in a strong wave of feeling, that there was truth in that verse of Louise's favourite poet—Louise's passion for esoteric poetry was the theme of many affectionate jokes in Cromwell Place—which ran:

Abstinence sows sand all over
The ruddy limbs and flaming hair,
But desire gratified
Plants fruits of life and beauty there.

With a little sigh Lydia sank down again in her corner, and at that moment she saw the soldier again.

He was not, however, alone; for by his side walked the girl in the brown coat who had come to be a chambermaid—doubtless—at the Grand Hotel. His head was bent towards her, and he was talking rapidly, with great animation; employing, no doubt, the same methods that he had tried a short half-hour ago with Lydia. But in this case he had evidently been more successful; for his arm was already clasped possessively about the girl's firm waist and she was listening to his words in a mute ecstasy, her head inclined towards his shoulder, her eyes cast down, an inscrutable smile curving her rosy cheeks and full red lips. With a deep pang Lydia realized that it was this girl whom the soldier had seen by the palings when he deserted her so abruptly.

As their lagging footsteps drew near the

shelter, the pair saw her. The soldier called "Good night, miss!" with cheerful effrontery; the girl raised her lowered eyelids and gave Lydia a smile of greeting, but said nothing. Lydia's answering "Good night" quavered a little. As soon as they had passed she flew out of the shelter towards duty and Foyle Tower. Her feelings as she did so were rather strange, for by some curious emotional reaction the incident had awakened in her a yearning for the presence of Wilfred. Had it been he who accosted her just now, she reflected as she hurried on with rapid and uneven footsteps, she would not need to have repelled him; had it been Wilfred she might now have formed one of just such a happy pair as the girl and the soldier. Wilfred! Her lips quivered upon his name, and inexplicably she burst into tears. Her fit of sobbing did her good, and by the time she had regained her self-control she felt quite a strong desire to see the pair of lovers again; to look upon their happiness enabled her to imagine that which might perhaps one day be hers.

Her wish was realized, for after that night she often saw the pair together—indeed, her holiday seemed to be composed of dreary hours when she tried vainly to secure the sympathy of the Foyle Towerites, and brief thrilling moments when she tasted this vicarious joy in the sight of their love. As the days passed on, however, this joy became shackled with a disapproval which was inherent in Lydia's nature, for the two were together so much that she could not imagine how they reconciled

it with their respective duties. The weather was superb. In the fresh sunny mornings, while the blue sea sparkled, the shelter was the centre of life; dogs barked joyously around it, swam out into the sea in front of it for sticks and shook their wet coats all over its seats on their return: children ran about it playing and screaming, laughing and quarrelling: old ladies sat in it knitting and talking scandal: Lydia, in a corner, tried to read a book of essays or wrote letters to the still maidless Louise. Many times, as she lifted her eyes to the sea for inspiration, she saw the pair walking briskly past, the soldier very erect and trim, swinging his swagger cane smartly, the girl rather pathetic with her firm young body almost bursting from its ill-made clothes, rather mysterious, too, with her lowered eyes and calm inscrutable smile. In the afternoon the centre of activities moved to an elm-shaded walk between town and front, where grew sweet-scented orange wallflowers, pale nodding daffodils, and giant snowdrops. Lydia, returning through its dappled sunlight from some dreary Foyle Tower walk, often met the lovers idling down the centre of the path; the soldier now seemed dreamy and abstracted, and struck idly at the bushes with his little cane, but the girl's eyes showed as blue and lively, and her smile was franker, less mysteriously reserved. They always greeted Lydia most respectfully, and at times seemed even to wish to stop and talk; but Lydia did not feel she could countenance their

loves to that extent. Why were they not working at these hours, she asked herself severely; and what but evil could result of the girl's association with such a fickle member of a profession notoriously untrue? She could not but notice, however, that when they passed by the sea seemed bluer, the elms greener, the wallflowers more gamboge—as though in some mysterious way life flowed from them and animated their surroundings. When they passed by, too, her thoughts always flew to Wilfred, and a pleasurable ache established itself at her heart.

One Sunday afternoon, the second of her stay, Lydia saw them manœuvring a boat on the canal. It was a lively scene; soldiers of all kinds—some in tartan, some in riding breeches, some with cartridge belts across their shoulders, as Lydia conscientiously observed—were rowing up and down the stretch of smooth water in uproarious groups. Private citizens in premature flannels paddled canoes containing girls in light-coloured frocks; here and there middle-aged fathers pulled their families laboriously about in heavy capacious craft. Lydia was alone when the neat little skiff bearing the soldier and the girl glided past. The soldier waved a friendly hand to her; the girl, who was clasping her tam-o'-shanter to her knee, gave her a trustful and affectionate smile. Lydia smiled and nodded, then pursued her way wondering again what the girl's mother—assuming the poor child had one—would say if she could see her now.

She rounded a bend in the canal and was astonished to find the boat drawn up beside the sloping bank as if in wait for her. She paused, dismayed.

"Take you down to the bridge, miss," offered the soldier with a merry twinkle in his grey eyes.

To Lydia's astonishment she suddenly found herself stepping into the skiff; her motives in doing so were obscure to herself, but she experienced a feeling of irresponsible joy and relaxation which was rare to her. The girl in the brown coat, whose short hair was gently ruffled by the soft breeze, stolidly made room for her, and the skiff proceeded smoothly on its way.

It was certainly pleasant on the canal. On one side rose a fair green hill, dotted with small prancing white lambs and large immobile sheep of a decent grey. At the foot of the hill a row of fine trees, planted to give cover to the defenders of England against the wicked Buonaparte, shaded the towing-path and lent the charm of perspective to the view. On the other bank of the canal fresh green meadows carried the eye peacefully towards the open sea. It was a scene of spring, of youth, of hopefulness; and though the girl at Lydia's side, with her robust limbs and heavy shabby clothes, was by no means Botticellian in appearance, Lydia felt irresistibly reminded of that master's celebrated rendering of the *primavera*. For a few short moments she seemed to be living in the picture; then she was

attacked by the conviction that her presence in the skiff was desired less for its intrinsic merit than for its use as a screen—there was some sergeant, she thought vaguely, annoyed by her own ignorance of the military hierarchy, or perhaps some authority at the hotel, whom the lovers were wishful to deceive. Lydia stiffened and was silent; and the hill, the sheep, the trees, the blue line of the sea, and the silver ribbon of the canal vanished from her sight. The other two also seemed to have nothing to say, or perhaps they read their meanings in each other's eyes; and the bridge was reached without a single word having been uttered by any of the trio.

"I'll get out here," announced Lydia in her coolest tones.

The soldier obediently drew up the skiff and helped her to alight.

"Thank you," said Lydia severely as she scrambled up the bank.

The skiff floated off again, and Lydia immediately regretted that she had left it. The pair of lovers in their little boat fitted so perfectly into the joyous pageant of spring, and Lydia herself was so entirely out of it, that she felt serving their loves was perhaps a small price to pay for participation. In an access of cordiality she waved to them; this time the soldier—the canal was crowded here and he was busy with his sculls—did not respond, but he spoke to the girl, who turned, and raising one substantial arm moved it stiffly in a laborious attempt to imitate Lydia's

greeting. Lydia was curiously touched by this sign of intimacy.

3

When, therefore, on the following Thursday evening Lydia saw the girl in the brown coat sitting alone on a seat in front of Foyle Tower, she felt justified in saying "Good evening" to her with a cheerful smile as she passed. The girl's lips moved slightly in reply, but her blue eyes remained serious. Lydia reached the near end of the promenade and turned back again; the girl was still in the same easy attitude, her hands lying loosely in her lap, her eyes apparently resting on the grey waves. This time she gave Lydia a glance of recognition but did not stir; Lydia reflected that she was probably waiting for the soldier, and with a disapproving sigh quickened her step and passed on. The strains of "Auld Lang Syne" came to her reluctant ears; the Foyle Towerites, whom the morrow would part, were indulging in sentimental farewells. Lydia frowned and, with the intention of removing herself as far from the Tower as was possible, walked briskly along the promenade away from the seated girl. The weather seemed about to break; the sky was cloudy, the sea grey and turbulent, the air moist; by the time Lydia reached the farther end of the promenade, where the big hotel stood, she felt chilled to the bone, and was glad to turn her back upon the cold and driving wind. To her surprise the girl in the brown coat was still visible in the

same position; from this distance there was something forlorn and deserted about her solitary figure, and Lydia felt an impulse of sympathy towards her. As she advanced towards her she expected every minute to see that other familiar figure, the one in khaki, appear and join her; but when she reached the seat the girl was still there alone. Her hands looked red with cold, and her white throat seemed to Lydia dangerously exposed to the bitter wind.

"Aren't you cold sitting there?" volunteered Lydia in her best public manner of brightness, pausing in front of the seat.

The girl appeared to reflect deeply, and then answered with an air of shy surprise: "No." She moved aside a parcel which lay on the seat at her right, and Lydia sat down beside her.

"Aren't you busy at the hotel at this time?" pursued Lydia, instinctively voicing her constant preoccupation with duty.

The girl looked shyly at her—Lydia was struck afresh by the blueness of her eyes, the fresh and comely rosiness of her round cheeks—and after a pause observed in a detached tone: "I'm not at the hotel now."

"Not?" exclaimed Lydia.

The girl said that they had given her a week's pay instead of notice. "They said I was out too much," she explained in a stolid and unremorseful tone.

"I'm not really surprised at that," Lydia told her, allowing a gentle reproof to appear in her manner. "But what will you do now?"

The girl looked at Lydia and at the sea, smiled a little, and observed at length: "I don't know." Her tone was interested but calm, as though she were discussing the fate of some quite other red-cheeked girl.

"Well——" began Lydia, and paused, somewhat disconcerted by this casual attitude to disaster. "But what *will* you do?" she pressed, driven on by the feeling of moral responsibility with which she was so familiar. "Shall you go home?"

The girl appeared to consider this, also, deeply and at length; but Lydia was becoming used to her long periods of silence, and put them down less to reflection than to a slowness in finding words. She waited patiently, and at last the girl replied, in those abrupt, rather rough, shy but somehow friendly tones of hers, that she thought of taking a room here and finding a place in a public-house—she had worked in one before, she said, at home, and was quite used to them.

Lydia exclaimed in horror. The Reverend Charles had brought her up to have a rooted objection to public-houses, and to imagine the young, attractive figure beside her planted down in such an atmosphere of temptation made her shudder. And with the soldier in camp just over the hill, too! It was impossible, it was not to be thought of, she told the girl emphatically. The girl looked at her in a kind of respectful surprise, and after a while volunteered the information that she was quite used to the work; her elder sister worked

in the one at the end of the street at home, and she had often helped her.

"But it was a little one," she concluded, in her manner of putting each word separately forth into the world. "Not a big place like the Grand."

Lydia thought she understood better now how the child had come to be engaged at that hotel; and she realized still more thoroughly her complete unsuitability for the place. "You must go back to your home," she told her with all the persuasive moral force inherited by those who bore the name of Tolefree. "You can wait at home till you find another place." She went on to explain the purpose of registry offices, but the girl interrupted her by saying with some decision: "I shan't go home."

Lydia sighed despairingly, but the combative moral side of her nature urged her on, and she pursued firmly: "Where is your home?"

"I shan't go home," murmured the girl; and she explained to Lydia that there were eight of them at home besides herself and her elder sister. The Grand had been her first real place, it appeared, though she had gone out by the day before. She had answered an advertisement and got the place. "I shan't go home," she concluded with an air of finality.

Lydia was able to imagine for herself the joy of the family when they had found an economic niche for one of their number, and their dismay if she should be thrown back again upon their hands. "It's a pity you didn't manage to keep the

place," she hinted, feeling that such an opportunity for the inculcation of moral precepts ought not to be missed. Even as she uttered the words, however, she felt insincere, for she was sure that the girl's outings with the soldier were only part of the dissatisfaction of the Grand with her as a maid; and when the girl replied, "It wasn't the kind of place for me," she felt justly rebuked. "Well," she began again, and broke off, saying in a more sympathetic tone: "Won't you tell me your name?"

After her customary pause the girl said: "Annice Lee."

Something familiar in the cadence of this made Lydia ask her quickly: "Where is your home? What part of England do you come from?"

The girl turned her friendly blue eyes full upon Lydia's face and named a mining district in the West Riding.

"Oh!" cried Lydia. "Oh!" The situation seemed somehow immensely simplified by the fact that the girl came from Yorkshire. Of course she would take her home with her as a maid for Louise. Now that she had thought of this plan she could not imagine why it had not occurred to her before. "Oh!" she repeated. "I come from Yorkshire too," she confided to Annice.

"Yes, miss," said the girl simply. "I saw it on your luggage in the train."

Lydia was rather disconcerted by this piece of shrewdness, but she recovered herself and began to set forth her plan. Annice could return to

Yorkshire with her on the morrow; Mrs. Mellor would train her; Annice would be near home and able to see her family at regular intervals—the idea was simply splendid from every point of view. Annice said nothing, but Lydia thought she could feel reluctance in her attitude; imagining that she was encountering the influence of the soldier from over the hill, she set herself with all her force to fight it. She did not refer to him in any way, for she felt instinctively that if she did she would be routed, but dwelt upon the nearness of Annice's family, the kindness of Louise, and her own pleasure if she could take Annice home with her. This last was perfectly genuine; from the first she had been inexplicably attracted to the girl, and now she felt a real affection for her. The firm substantial curves of her young body seemed homely and reassuring, her eyes and lips were friendly and—in spite of the soldier—good; there was something alive and merry about her which made one feel cheerful even in sight of Foyle Tower. With these thoughts at the back of her mind Lydia went on expounding and arguing the advantages of her plan with earnest vigour. Her face grew flushed, and her hat slipped to the back of her head, while her companion, motionless, gazed quietly out to sea. At last Annice interrupted her.

"All right," she said unexpectedly, "I'll come."

She turned her head and smiled at Lydia, and at once it became plain to the older girl that the attraction between them was mutual; her own

affection was returned by this stalwart child of adversity. She was surprised but immensely pleased, and jumped up at once to put her plan into execution. Annice, startled but dutiful, rose and followed her, the paper parcel containing all her worldly goods in her hand.

Lydia despatched a telegram to Louise announcing Annice's arrival, and then busied herself with finding a room for the girl for the night, as it appeared she was not to return to the hotel. This was not so easy; Lydia had no idea where to look for a suitable room, and when they had tramped the place for an hour unsuccessfully—Lydia with increasing despondency, Annice with her customary air of serene indifference—Lydia decided to consult the Foyle Tower authorities. They, however, were far from helpful (possibly because of Lydia's tone in making the request). Glancing sourly at the hole in Annice's coat, they affirmed that they knew of no such place, and that all their rooms, as Lydia knew, were full. Annice hereupon affirmed that if she was left to herself she could find a room all right and meet Lydia at the station next morning; but this Lydia would not hear of—she had too definite and lurid a picture in her mind of the possible result of leaving a homeless Annice free to listen to the persuasions of the soldier. Eventually, by taking a very high tone with the Foyle Towerites, and offering a payment rather out of proportion to the service required, she secured the privilege of accommodating Annice on a sofa

in her own room. This arrangement was repugnant to the fastidious Lydia, and it appeared to be equally repugnant to Annice; the girl's bright cheeks took on a deeper hue, and she protested stoutly that she could easily find a room if she were left to it. Lydia, however, was now excited to the point of overbearing all opposition, and the pair passed the night together.

Lydia sent the child early to bed, so that the painful scantiness of her wardrobe—at which she guessed—might not be a source of embarrassment to her, and when she herself came up Annice was rosily asleep. But in the small hours of the morning a fierce wind and much heavy rain kept Lydia awake, and a subdued sigh from the sofa led her to believe that her companion was awake too. In this she was wrong, for no amount of wind could keep Annice awake; but when she spoke to the girl in a low tone, after what seemed her usual hesitation, Annice answered. Encouraged by the screening darkness, the two fell into confidences about their respective lives. Lydia spoke of the Reverend Charles, of Louise, of the Dysons, and Cromwell Place; Annice in occasional jerky sentences threw out facts about life in the mining district which was her home, and about the management of the Grand Hotel. The soldier she did not mention, and Lydia again did not feel that she could press her on that point; but after some hesitation the elder girl brought out a few moral maxims and cautionary tales which she thought applicable to

that part of Annice's story. Annice received these in a silence so complete that Lydia thought she must have fallen asleep during their recital, and spoke her name interrogatively. The girl replied at once with her usual serene cheerfulness, and Lydia felt that her previous silence had been an intentional rebuff.

"We'd better go to sleep now," she said rather severely. "Good night."

"Good night," replied Annice cheerfully in her calm round tones.

She sounded so completely unconscious of any deficiencies in her behaviour that Lydia sighed and was silent.

Next morning the pair set out early for Cromwell Place.

III

PROFIT AND LOSS

I

"THERE'S Mr. Wilfred, Miss Lydia," said Annice with a bright shy smile.

It was her first evening in the Mellor household; looking raw and pathetic, but somehow very lovable, in the solitary print frock with which her mother had furnished her forth into the world, she leaned against Lydia's bedroom door and made this announcement with joyous gusto.

Lydia, on her knees unpacking, looked up, startled. Annice had only just that second made Wilfred's acquaintance, for he had not, as Lydia had half hoped, come to the station to meet them; he was detained by a customer, explained Eric, who had come instead. Lydia had been conscious of a most unreasonable feeling of disappointment at this substitution, and her annoyance was not diminished by the behaviour of Eric, who gaped silently at Annice all through the short drive up to Cromwell Place, and seemed unable to take his eyes off her for a moment. Annice had behaved with all due decorum, turning her head aside and gazing out of the window with proper

maidenly reserve; but Lydia felt that her cousin's unmannerliness, not to say boorishness, was getting beyond all bounds and needed to be taken thoroughly in hand. Thanks to this incident, however, Annice might be said to be acquainted with Eric, but she was not so in any sense with Wilfred; how was it then that she uttered his name with such an emphatic and significant intonation? Lydia coloured as she gave herself the answer to this question, for it was obvious even to her simplicity that Annice regarded Wilfred as Lydia's young man; and as she ran downstairs she reflected, in an amusement tinged with alarm, on the bent of Annice's mind, which had thus at once settled on a possible intimacy between herself and Wilfred as the chief point of interest in its new situation. She was still conscious of the significance of Annice's having run up a flight of stairs to tell her of Wilfred's arrival—which certainly nobody had instructed her to do: Wilfred's visits to number seven were much too frequent for such a formality—when she entered the room and met him.

Whether it was due to the soldier, or to Annice, or to the sight of the two together, or to the stimulus of Annice's tone just now, Lydia did not know; but as soon as her eyes rested upon Wilfred her heart gave a quick leap and she was almost sure she loved him. Her colour rose and her candid tones fluttered as she greeted him; and Wilfred, who desired greatly to marry Lydia but feared that she was too superior to condescend

to him, was much encouraged. He took her hand, smiled his wide friendly smile, looked at her with his customary air of affectionate admiration, and observed: "Well, Lydia!" in frank cheerful tones, which Lydia now seemed to recognize as the kindest she had ever heard.

"Well, Wilfred!" she returned, rather breathless from the impact of her own sensations.

"How have you enjoyed yourself? You didn't care much for that Home place, I'm afraid," pursued Wilfred.

"You've heard about it, then?" said Lydia, striving to recover her composure.

"Oh, we don't forget *you* while you're away, however little you may think about *us*," replied Wilfred soberly.

At this all the intimate dreams in which she had indulged while watching Annice and her soldier lover naturally rushed into Lydia's mind; utterly confused, she murmured: "Oh yes, I did," in a suffocated tone, and hanging her head, blushed deeply.

"I'm glad of that," said Wilfred with emphasis, too straightforward to pretend to misunderstand her.

Charles now spoke from his chair by the hearth and broke upon their privacy, but their few words together had been enough; from that hour their relationship entered on a new phase, and Charles's hopes for them seemed likely of fulfilment.

It was not only on this account, however, that

Lydia congratulated herself a hundred times during the next few months on her acquisition of Annice; for from the first the girl was a general favourite and a great success. Wilfred approved heartily of her bright face and willing service, and of the way she smiled at him when she opened the door and told him Lydia was in; Charles gladly extended to her his universal benevolence, adding to it in her case a humorous paternal affection; Dyson commented favourably on her firm red cheeks; while Louise frankly loved her. In the long hours while Lydia was out at work and Charles wrestled with backward youths in his study, Louise and Annice became intimate—as far as it was possible for anyone to become intimate with Annice—over their common household tasks. They made beds together, conferred seriously over the quantity of milk which was desirable for the day, arranged and rearranged meals for the coming week with childish solemnity, and united in a thousand little schemes for the welfare of Charles and Lydia, those pivots of the household. Annice soon became acquainted with the minutest preferences of the Mellors; she knew Lydia's prejudices about blankets, and how much sugar Charles liked in his tea; she knew where all the linen was kept, and was familiar with the resources of the jam cupboard. Louise was too dreamy to make an efficient housekeeper; she forgot details, changed her plans often, made small muddles and then grew fluttered in correcting them; but whatever she

did always seemed to meet with Annice's hearty approval. Annice was never cross, never sharp, never critical, never in a hurry; when anything pleasant happened she smiled joyously and said nothing; when anything untoward occurred her round blue eyes assumed an expression of respectful sympathy, she smiled and was silent. She was always willing to do anything that Louise proposed, and to undo it again if Louise proposed that later; nothing pleased her better than to be sent errands, and to run from the cellar to the top of the house and back was a bagatelle to her. It was early discovered that she knew nothing whatever of her duties; but she learned so rapidly and followed her instructions with such implicit faith that the whole family took an immense pleasure in teaching them to her. Charles himself gave her "tips" on the proper method of announcing his many callers, and her prowess in setting the table in exact accordance with Louise's wishes was daily commented upon. The sharp-eyed Lydia, however, too often perceived dust lying about in corners which Annice was supposed to have cleaned. Once she remonstrated. The girl obediently fetched a duster and poked out the offending corner with her customary air of inscrutable reserve, but she gave Lydia afterwards a look which seemed to hint that Annice's blue eyes could be very defiant indeed when not restrained by love for Lydia. That look somehow choked the words of reproof in Lydia's throat; and thereafter she allowed the dusty corners—

and various other instances of Annice's reckless methods—to pass.

Annice's poverty, her utter destitution in the matter of clothes, smote heavily upon the Tolefree conscience, and the noble simplicity of her attitude to these matters touched the Tolefree heart. It was not long before Annice's flimsy and cheap undergarments were replaced by solid wool; her red hands were clothed in gloves, an old hat of Lydia's bloomed again on her smooth round head, shoes were purchased, and a scheme for the acquisition of a coat was set on foot. These simple additions improved Annice's appearance so immensely that the girl seemed literally to blossom before her employers' eyes. The Mellors did not believe in sapping anyone's independence by too lavish gifts, and so each fresh possession of Annice's was in part bought by money of her own earning. As she was also making a regular weekly contribution to her family, the poor child was left lamentably without pocket-money, and to remedy this without damaging her economic integrity Charles made her a sporting offer of sixpence for every basketful of bull-foot which she rooted up from the square of grass in front of number seven. Annice received this suggestion with her customary reserve, but the next evening found her on her knees on a mat in the garden with an implement in her hand; in a day or two Dyson was heard to inquire with astonishment whether a dog or a hen had been let loose in Cromwell Place, and Annice was the richer by

half a crown. Let out by request that evening with this sum in her hand, she vanished for an hour or two—amid much friendly speculation on the Mellors' part as to what she would buy—and inexplicably returned with a goldfish in a bowl of water, for which she had paid, she said, ninepence, the change from the half-crown being now firmly clutched in her warm hand, for she had as yet no purse. Even Louise was astonished by this vagary, and ventured to ask its cause. Annice, after her usual hesitation, replied that goldfish were nice to watch, and the matter had to be left at that.

Attempts had already been made to interest Annice in sewing and reading. A work-basket had been fitted up for the first purpose—Charles himself contributing to it a silver thimble—and a library ticket had been secured by Lydia as regards the second; but though Annice showed signs of pride in these possessions, she very rarely used them. If one went into the kitchen at odd hours in the evening to see how Annice was getting on, one usually found her sitting by the window with her elbows on the table, doing nothing whatever, her blue eyes fixed unwaveringly upon the fish as it curved and swam in its tiny bowl. Lydia occasionally watched it too, and offered a few friendly comments on its antics; but Annice seemed to dislike this, for she always turned away her head and replied in curt monosyllables, so that Lydia felt snubbed. It was indeed never possible to extract rhapsodies from Annice; she

was fond of flowers and animals, of blue skies and sunshine, of heavy rain and wind, of pretty clothes, of sunsets, of children, of going to the pictures, of music and of Louise; but these preferences had to be inferred from her looks rather than from anything she said, and often when her eyes seemed just on the point of being expressive she veiled them beneath her thick straight lashes. One summer night when the sky was clad in the beauty of a thousand stars the Mellors came home from a conference to find Annice leaning against the open door, her face turned upwards to the sky, apparently lost in an ecstasy of admiration. Charles, delighted, held forth for a minute or two in his best pulpitese, making quotations from his favourite poets and throwing in a little inaccurate but interesting astronomy. Annice said nothing, as usual, and when Charles reached his customary peroration that it was indeed wonderful to behold the wonderful works of God, she gave him a flat "Yes," and suddenly vanishing away through the open door, whisked herself off into the kitchen. Charles was left somewhat disconcerted on the doorstep, but it was on these occasions that his sense of humour came in useful; he chuckled to himself, shook his fine silvery head, and went in, declaring to Eric, who, it appeared, was in the hall waiting for them with a vague message from his father, that the girl was right not to listen to the prosy maunderings of the previous generation—youth must be served, and served in its own way, he said.

This remark summed up a certain tendency which seemed somehow to have invaded the Mellor household with the coming of Annice. Lydia's decision to let Annice's carelessness with corners pass was part of the same tendency. It was a tendency which would have horrified the Tolefree ancestor in the frilled cap; a tendency to let carelessness with corners pass, to leave vexatious details alone; a tendency to regard life as a beautiful and jolly thing instead of as a strenuous battle; a tendency to relax one's efforts, to cease to criticize and begin to enjoy. Spring had marched on into a particularly warm and glowing summer. In the park across the road the flower-beds were brilliant in the sunshine, the brass bands played cheerful rhythmic tunes, the youth of the town paraded and made love; and in Cromwell Place, too, there were light hearts and joyous fantasies. Lydia was now undoubtedly in love; she had fallen into the state of mind when nothing mattered to her except Wilfred. A day was good if she saw him, bad if she did not. His attitudes, his smile, the look in his eyes, his heavy careless speech, the imperturbable good humour with which he turned aside his father's sarcastic shafts, his respectful kindness to Charles, the skilful movements of his dirty hands—all these were becoming intensely significant to her; they stood out against the flat level of the rest of her life like living actors against a painted scene. The very things which had irritated her in him before she met Annice—his untuneful whistling,

his prosaic attitude to life, his use of humour in and out of season—now inexplicably became dear to her. She was well aware that in education and intelligence Wilfred was her inferior, but strangely enough—as she thought—this was far from decreasing her passion for him. She passed through hours of agonizing, but blissful, suspense when she wondered whether her feelings for him were returned; and as the summer months wore on she began to feel that this happiness was really hers. He was diffident—but that was Dyson's fault—and the determined realism of his view of life did not permit much show of sentiment on his part; but Lydia bloomed in the increasing certainty that he loved her. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes shone, she took more trouble with her dress, she laughed more often; impulses to confide in Annice often suddenly overtook her, and the two held long aimless conversations in which Lydia fluttered persistently round the subject near her heart without ever mentioning it, while Annice in reply demurely and as it were respectfully teased her. Annice indeed sometimes skilfully hinted that she thought Mr. Wilfred's methods slow and his courtship tedious, but Lydia always gave her Tolefree smile at this—she was well satisfied with Wilfred's methods as they were. Anything more headlong would have gone counter to her ideas of decorum; and to her the whole summer seemed like a strain of music, heard first afar off and then growing, growing.

Eric and Wilfred were both a good deal a

number seven that summer. Wilfred had conceived the happy idea of constructing a wireless set as a present for his uncle—he had always wanted to make one throughout with his own hands, he said, and he was sure it would be nice for Louise, who was so much alone. Eric, it appeared, rather to his relatives' surprise, was equally enthusiastic about this project, though of course much less well informed on radio matters than his brother. Charles accepted the present with boyish eagerness; he bought a book on the subject and made gallant efforts to understand the mysterious terms which tripped so glibly from Wilfred's lips as he stood in the study amid coils of wire and batteries, screw-drivers and ear-phones. For a reason never definitely stated but well understood by all concerned, the wireless was to be constructed from first to last on the premises of number seven, and it came to seem natural that Wilfred and Lydia should occupy the study, while Eric ranged the house for tools or stood in the garden with Annice, picking out likely spots for the erection of the aerial. Annice took a keen interest in the wireless, and understood it remarkably well; so that it seemed only fair to make an extension which would enable her to enjoy it in the kitchen. This part of the task was entrusted to Eric, and Lydia was a trifle shocked, on coming into the kitchen one night, to see him bending over Annice, adjusting the ear-phones on her head, while the girl herself, who was in her usual seat beside the goldfish, looked over his

shoulder into the distance with her inscrutable smile.

"Well, Eric!" said Lydia with a slight asperity in her light tones, "I should think you would manage that better if Annice took it off."

Eric, confused, muttered something intended for assent, and began to fumble with the connecting bands, which had become entangled in Annice's hair.

"Let *me* do it," said Annice in a tone of good-natured contempt, raising her hands to her hair. "He doesn't know anything about it, miss," she added on a note of raillery, smiling at Lydia as she removed the apparatus.

"I do!" protested Eric, colouring. "It's caught in your hair, that's all."

He seemed really annoyed and inclined to be sullen. Annice, on the contrary, laughed, and handed him the ear-phones with a sparkle in her eyes.

"Well, we'll have supper now, Annice," said Lydia, dismissing the incident.

"Yes, Miss Lydia," replied Annice dutifully, in her calm tones. She took up her cap from the table beside her and settled it with one swift movement on her smooth head; then, rising, went to the dresser and began to take out glasses and silver, setting them down on the tray with a careless thump which drew an exclamation of remonstrance from Lydia. Annice gave a repentant smile and hitched one apron-string higher on her shoulder. "Is Mr. Wilfred and Mr. Eric staying

to supper, Miss Lydia?" she demanded firmly, an affectionate mockery in her tone. Lydia, colouring, but not displeased, replied that they were.

Lydia then returned through the open doors to Wilfred, who had no doubt heard what had passed in the kitchen, and astonished her by asking abruptly if a certain blue hat she used to wear were still hers, or whether she had given it to Annice. She told him it was Annice's, whereat his face darkened.

"Why did you want to know, Wilfred?" asked Lydia, disturbed.

Wilfred replied with unwonted curtness that he thought he had seen the hat in the park the other night.

"Oh yes," said Lydia, relieved. "We sent her out to hear the band."

Wilfred grunted non-committally, and his face did not clear.

"I suppose she had a good character?" he began again after a few minutes. "At her last place, I mean."

Lydia's face burned.

"Of course," she replied with assumed indignation; not, however, looking him in the face.

"That's all right then," said Wilfred hastily.

"Why did you ask?" demanded Lydia with a show of boldness. As he did not reply, she suggested with embarrassment: "Perhaps she was with a man?"

Wilfred gave her a queer look and replied that she was—that is, if the girl he saw were really Annice.

An alarming thought struck Lydia, and she exclaimed: "Was it a soldier?"

Wilfred gave her a still queerer look and replied that it was not.

"Had I better speak to her, do you think?" mused Lydia.

"Certainly not," said Wilfred emphatically. "Now don't, Lydia. No doubt it's nothing. Don't think of it again. As a matter of fact," he added after some hesitation, "I know the lad I saw her with, and I'll have a word with him."

Lydia did not quite like this. She was nothing if not honest, and could not condemn Annice for seeking love when she herself was grasping at it with both hands. "After all," she argued with a troubled smile, "it's natural, Wilfred. She's young. It's only natural."

Wilfred sniffed and seemed unconvinced.

"Give me the hammer," he said gruffly. "And mind, don't say anything to her about it, Lydia. You'll only put ideas into her head."

It was still strange and sweet to Lydia to yield her will to his, so she agreed meekly that she would say nothing.

One Sunday evening shortly after this Lydia was alone in the house with Annice. Annice's Sunday evening arrangements were peculiar, and a source of some agitation to the Mellors. All the other maids who had lived with them had gone

decently to chapel every Sunday night, as became members of a minister's household; but Annice, after trying this arrangement once or twice, showed no enthusiasm for it; indeed, she preferred to remain in the house rather than be allowed out on such terms. This was disconcerting, and fluttered the Mellors considerably, both in itself and as a sign of the times; but after some discussion it was decided by Charles that the girl was within her rights in spending her Sunday evenings as she chose and that there was no other missionary weapon open to them but force of example. This particular Sunday was Annice's evening "in"; she had been offered a walk in the park but had declined it, preferring, she said, to remain in the garden. Louise had thereupon suggested to Lydia that it would perhaps be as well not to leave the girl alone in the house. Lydia was surprised at this from Louise, as Cromwell Place could not by any stretch of imagination be called lonely, and Louise was not given to undue nervousness on this or any other point; but remembering Wilfred's confidences about the blue hat, she agreed with Louise's observation and said that she herself would remain at home. She therefore established herself at the front door with the Mellors' deck-chair—bought when Charles was convalescing a year or two ago—and a book; while Annice sat at the back door with herself and the goldfish. Lydia had perhaps read three pages when she heard Wilfred's step coming along Cromwell

Place, and in a moment his head and shoulders appeared over the laurel bushes of number seven.

"Busy?" he inquired in that tone of admiring affection which he bestowed on even the smallest of Lydia's activities nowadays.

Lydia, with a smile, said that she was not busy. She opened the gate for him and invited him in, explaining as she did so that Charles and Louise had just left the house.

"Yes, I saw them go," said Wilfred. "I saw you weren't with them, and I've come to take you out for a walk."

Lydia reluctantly said that she was afraid she could not go.

"Oh, but you must," persisted Wilfred with his air of invincible common sense. He explained that the moors on one of the hills outside the town were on fire; they could be seen in part from the windows of Boothroyd House, but he meant to go nearer and obtain a better view. The spectacle was a fine one—"just the kind of thing you like, Lydia," he concluded.

His consideration for her intellectual enjoyments, which he did not in the least understand, always touched Lydia; and when, seeing the refusal in her face, he went on to plead the golden warmth of the summer evening as perfect for a walk—"Do you good to get some fresh air, Lydia," he urged—she felt extremely sorry to be obliged to decline.

"I should like to come, Wilfred," she said in

her light candid tones. "But Louise wanted me to stay in and keep Annice company."

Wilfred stared. "Does Aunt Louise think Annice'll run off with the house if she's left alone with it?" he inquired, amused.

"After what you said the other evening," began Lydia.

"Oh, that!" said Wilfred. His face assumed an air of apology. "That was all nothing," he explained. "I'm sorry I ever mentioned it to you. It was Eric I saw her with, you know."

"Eric!" exclaimed Lydia, astounded.

"Yes. And I didn't quite like it," pursued Wilfred. "But, however, when I spoke to him about it he said that she just came up and asked him the time. She hasn't a watch, you know, and there's no clock in sight in the park."

"This was true enough.

"I'm glad it wasn't anything," observed Lydia with relief.

"I'm sorry I mentioned it to you," repeated Wilfred apologetically. "Now say you'll come, Lydia."

"Well——" began Lydia, hesitating. "I'll just go in and see," she proffered vaguely. "Sit down a minute, Wilfred."

Wilfred obediently let himself down into the deck-chair, and Lydia went through the house to the kitchen. Annice was sitting in the rocking-chair with her hands folded in her lap, gazing vaguely out through the open doorway.

"Annice," began Lydia dubiously, "do you

think you would be all right in the house alone?"

"Yes, Miss Lydia," replied Annice with alacrity. As Lydia still hesitated, she added in a comforting and persuasive tone: "You go out with Mr. Wilfred, Miss Lydia. I shall be quite all right."

Lydia coloured, and hoped that her conversation with Wilfred had not been entirely audible in the kitchen.

"I hardly know——" she began.

Annice smiled; her cheeks curved into dimples and her blue eyes took on a roguish sparkle.

"You go along, Miss Lydia," she urged warmly, sitting up to press the matter with more vigour. "If you don't, perhaps he won't ask you again."

"Really, Annice!" said Lydia with as much hauteur as she could command. "It's simply a question of whether you would be afraid to be left alone or not."

"Afraid!" repeated Annice in a tone of good-natured contempt. "Oh no! I'm not afraid, Miss Lydia."

"Very well then," said Lydia stiffly. "I'll put the latch down on the front door, and we shan't be gone long."

"No, Miss Lydia," agreed Annice, casting down her lashes demurely. Her smile, however, persisted, and still lingered on her lips when a few minutes later she watched Lydia and Wilfred go down the Place together.

Lydia had intended to be absent half an hour at the most, but it was after nine o'clock when she and Wilfred returned. They had gone first to a point of vantage whence Wilfred thought the moor fires would be visible across the valley—a long level open road on the slope of a hill commanding a fine view of the surrounding country, which was used by the youth of the town as a parade ground on Sunday evenings, when there was no band in the park. To-night it was crowded with pairs of lovers of all ages, who paced slowly up and down with intent faces, or halted in large giggling groups. Lydia, who usually felt ill at ease with pairs of lovers, to-night was quite at home amongst them, and would have been content to remain there, pacing up and down beneath the clear blue August sky, admiring the silver beauty of the evening star, gazing pleasurably at the little patches of bright flame which glowed here and there on the crest of the opposing hill, and rejoicing that Wilfred was beside her. But Wilfred was not satisfied with the view; he assured his companion that the flames had looked far finer from the top windows of Boothroyd House. Lydia, who had utterly forgotten Annice, smiled vaguely and did not suggest that they should return there. Instead she followed Wilfred obediently as he tried various points of higher ground, and when he finally suggested that they should cross the valley to the moor itself, and gain a closer view, she eagerly agreed. The hill was farther than it looked, and by the

time they reached the fires the west was rosy with the threat of sunset, and the hills around were becoming silhouetted sharply against the sky. A good many other bold spirits had also come to view the flames, and Wilfred, who undoubtedly had the common touch if he could not walk with kings, strolled about amongst them collecting informative anecdotes about the fire's origin. The young women who accompanied these other watchers of the flames looked with interest at Lydia, and Lydia was pleased to be so regarded. She was perfectly happy. The fires themselves, she thought, were less impressive here than from the other side of the valley—they flickered and were not so clear, and the acrid smoke made her cough—but then there was such an air of excitement, of romance, of friendliness, about the scene, that the walk was well worth while for that alone. Wilfred was at his best amongst these other men; she admired the hearty, cordial manner of his talk with them. On his side Wilfred was proud of Lydia's light, cultivated tones, so superior to those of everybody else present; he was proud of the intelligence of her remarks, proud of the simple candour of her glance; and he swore to himself with great tenderness that it should always be his part to shield her high-mindedness from the world's corrupting touch.

They hardly knew when or why it was that they left the moor and wandered slowly down the stony path to the valley. As they climbed up the other side towards Hudley, Lydia became

pleasurably conscious that she was tired; and Wilfred, remorseful, put his hand beneath her elbow to help her up the slope. They reached the top to find the parade almost empty and twilight unmistakably falling; a sudden pang of conscience seemed to strike them both, and they struck out sharply for Cromwell Place.

"I hope Annice has been all right," murmured Lydia in a troubled tone.

"Sure to be," said Wilfred comfortingly. "Besides, won't Uncle Charles and Aunt be in before now?"

"No," said Lydia, still more troubled. "He's gone to preach, you know, and they're being entertained afterwards to supper."

Number seven, however, when at last they reached it, looked so solid, so sedate, so like itself, that Lydia was reassured, and smiled at Wilfred as she pulled the old-fashioned bell. A long pause ensued. Lydia pulled the bell again. There was another pause. The house somehow changed its aspect and appeared silent and deserted. Lydia turned to her companion.

"Can there be anything wrong?" she said, aghast.

"Why should there be?" said Wilfred sensibly. "Let *me* pull that bell."

"It sounded before," murmured Lydia unhappily, as he gave it a strong and experienced jerk.

In the recesses of the house the bell jangled tremendously, and went on jangling and tinkling

as though it would never cease. At last it died away; there was another pause; then at last there came a vague sound of footsteps; in the distance a door banged, causing Lydia to start nervously, and almost immediately Annice opened the front door with an abrupt and jerky movement.

"Well, Annice!" exclaimed Lydia, her voice sharpened by the intensity of her relief. "What do you mean by keeping us waiting all this time?"

"I was in the attic, Miss Lydia," returned Annice in a rather sullen voice. "I came as quickly as I could."

She certainly sounded breathless, and Lydia inwardly relented. She felt it necessary, however, to say something else of a reproving nature, and demanded severely: "What were you doing in the attic?"

"I was just going to brush my hair, Miss Lydia," replied Annice in a rude and angry tone.

Her hair certainly looked as though it required brushing. Lydia felt that she was playing a mean and nagging part, and she thought she saw in Wilfred's eyes that he thought so too.

"Well, it doesn't matter," she said soothingly. "Will you come in and have some supper, Wilfred?" she continued, turning to him.

"Well—I don't think I will, thanks," said he. "They'll be wondering what's become of me at home."

"Very well," said Lydia stiffly, feeling that the

poetry of the evening was all gone. "Good night, then."

"Good night," said Wilfred.

"I've laid for you, Mr. Wilfred," put in Annice suddenly. "And I told Mr. Eric you wouldn't be home for supper."

"Has Eric been here?" asked Wilfred in surprise.

"He came to see if you was here," explained Annice, her good humour apparently restored. "And I told him you was out with Miss Lydia and wouldn't be home for supper. So he went away."

"In that case," said Wilfred, hanging his hat on a convenient peg, "I may as well stay—if you'll have me, Lydia."

Lydia, smiling, intimated that she would. Forgetting how the time had flown during their walk, she hoped for a long quiet evening with him, and was rather disconcerted when Charles and Louise burst in upon them almost before they had begun supper. Charles, who was an excellent mimic, described his evening's doings in a way which caused much hilarity; and neither Lydia's walk nor Annice's peccadillo about the door rose to the surface of the conversation just then.

That seemed to be the last evening of summer weather, and soon autumn was upon them with its raw winds, its ferocious rain, its heavy clouded skies. Louise's rheumatism, which yearly cramped her hands and lamed her knee, afflicted her

with rather more than its customary force. Annice showed real concern about it, coupled with a kind of surprise; she had never seen anything like that before, she explained to Lydia with a look of wonder. Most of the duties of the household fell upon her willing shoulders; and if the corners were rather dustier than before, Louise's special dishes always received the best of Annice's attention, and Louise herself was always kept in cheerful spirits. Annice was admirable, too, in the firm watch she kept on Charles's boots. Charles's mind was usually so enthusiastically fixed on the things of the spirit that he never noticed when his boots needed soling, and the results of his absent-mindedness were often disastrous to his chest. Annice kept him warm and cosy, and was adamant in the despatch of his best-loved footgear to the menders, though he often pleaded with her to spare them to him for just one more day. She refused him firmly with a sparkle in her eye, and the two laughed heartily together, standing beside the boot-rack in the kitchen. Then, too, Annice was so splendid over Lydia's early breakfast. Lydia had a train to catch, and five minutes more or less in the appearance of her breakfast made all the difference to her comfort—it was infinitely preferable to her to have a poor breakfast punctually than a good breakfast late. No previous maid—nor, indeed, Louise herself—seemed able to grasp this essential principle, but Annice's breakfasts were always on the tick. She had, indeed, desired to serve the

meal to Lydia in bed, but her Spartan mistress refused this with disgust, and Annice yielded, reserving to herself the right of waking Lydia half an hour before the special breakfast-time. Punctually every morning she entered Lydia's room, drew up her blinds, announced the time, and informed her what kind of a day it was and the sort of coat she ought to wear. Sometimes, it is true, she sounded a trifle breathless, as though she had had to hurry a good deal, and sometimes she seemed to be holding some of her clothes in position with one hand; but she was not often more than a few seconds late. On the rare occasions when this calamity did occur the alarmed self-reproach in her voice as she announced the time was truly wonderful.

Every day that passed, in fact, made Annice a more integral and a more indispensable part of the Mellor household, and the deepening winter deepened the affection and gratitude with which Lydia regarded her.

2

When two women have lived together in filial intimacy for a long period of time, the emotions of one communicate themselves rapidly to the other without the medium of words. Lydia never needed to be told when something had occurred to distress Louise; she was wont to tease her mother by saying that she could feel it in the air as soon as she opened the front door, and certainly she

could read it in Louise's smile, her look, her slightest action.

One winter evening she experienced this depression of her nerves. Charles had no engagement that night, and the three Mellors sat comfortably together round the hearth. Outside, the wind howled in seasonable fashion; within, an enormous fire roared in fierce red and gold up the chimney—Dyson had sent them in a cellarful of logs, and Annice, being a miner's daughter, knew only too well how to arrange coal so that its combustion was rapid. The Tole-free ancestor looked benignly down from above the hearth, as usual. As usual, Charles, his silvery head nestling snugly into a well-placed cushion, his grey eyes sparkling with jolly malice, one plump white hand extended to shield his face from the blaze, discoursed brilliantly of things in general and wittily of people in particular, while Lydia egged him on, as usual. As usual, Louise was vaguely knitting some Christmas garment for the poor. Everything was as usual, and Lydia should have enjoyed her usual quiet content; but for some unaccountable reason her spirits began to sink. She shifted restlessly in her chair, sighed once or twice, wondered uneasily what was the matter with her, and suddenly shot a startled glance at Louise. The glance revealed that her diagnosis of her uneasiness was correct, for the face her mother bent above her work was closed and brooding. Instantly Lydia's spirits sank to zero, and she began to

rack her brain for the cause of Louise's depression. Was her rheumatism worse? Had Charles's cough shown disquieting symptoms? Or was Louise perhaps suffering from some casual sarcasm from an outsider or from Dyson? Charles's stout heart was impervious to all such, but they wounded the gentler spirit of his wife; as did, too, the spectacle of any of the more cruel and debasing twists of life. It was a characteristic of her mother, as Lydia knew, to bury the cause of trouble in her heart till its first bitterness was over and she could speak of it as though she did not care. In a day or two she would no doubt casually reveal this present grief, whatever it was, and the air would clear; but meanwhile her fair face was clouded, and Lydia felt miserable. She sighed again and responded at random to one of Charles's best anecdotes. It was astonishing, she reflected, how obtuse the male sex were to impressions of the kind she was just experiencing. Her father was undoubtedly one of the most sensitive and sympathetic of men, yet here he was, quite unconscious of the cloud which hung over Louise, chatting away in the best of spirits. Surely his cough could not be worse! Suddenly she remembered that Annice had seemed dull and quiet at tea-time. Perhaps she and Louise had had some tiff. This was very unlikely, but Lydia felt that it would be a relief to go and see; and she rose. At once Louise lifted her head.

"Where are you going?" she demanded abruptly.

Lydia, startled, replied in a mild tone that she was just going to see how Annice was getting on.

"Leave her alone," commanded Louise peremptorily. "She's busy with some sewing for me."

Lydia, of course, was obliged to sit down again. Her suspicion of some discontent between Louise and Annice was confirmed, but she was rather relieved than otherwise to find such a comparatively small cause for her mother's mood.

Half an hour later Wilfred's step was heard along the Place. A flush of pleasure rose to Lydia's cheeks, and her father smiled benignly. The bell sounded, Annice went to the door, and Wilfred could be heard hanging his coat up in the hall. None of the Mellors spoke, but Lydia took an intense pleasure in these phenomena of his arrival, which had lately become so customary. To-night, however, there was a slight departure from custom, for Annice vanished away into the kitchen without announcing the guest, and Wilfred had to usher in himself. A gust of cold air came in with him.

"There seems to be plenty of wind where you come from, Wilfred," observed Charles genially.

"I dare say," agreed the practical Wilfred, closing the door carefully behind him. "It's pretty strong outside."

His tone was so gloomy that Lydia looked at him in alarm, and was much disconcerted by the set and angry look on his dark face.

"Good evening, Wilfred," she observed rather timidly.

Wilfred replied gruffly without looking at her; he then sniffed, took out his handkerchief, and seated himself heavily on a small chair, which he drew out from under the table, knocking the leg clumsily as he did so.

"That's a grand fire you've got there," he observed when he was settled, regarding it. "Those logs burn pretty well, eh?"

"Well enough," replied Charles with emphasis. "It was very good of your father to send them in to us."

Wilfred gave an angry grunt which caused Lydia to think that probably he had had more to do with the logs than his father. She tried to catch his eye and indicate that she at least understood this; but he avoided her glance and, folding his arms, stared moodily into the fire.

"And how's business, Wilfred?" demanded Charles cheerfully.

He said it in the airy tone natural to one for whom business is and always has been a mere name, and Wilfred gave an exasperated sigh as he replied: "It's bad for most people, but not too bad for us. That's due to father, of course."

Charles, pleased, was about to expatiate sonorously on Dyson's business merits, when Wilfred interrupted in a determined tone: "I had a row with father this afternoon."

"A row!" said Charles. He sat up at once, and looked unhappily at his nephew. Louise, too, gave Wilfred a quick glance, and Lydia's

heart beat nervously. "A row!" repeated Charles in a very disconcerted tone. "What about, pray?"

"It's all very well," burst out Wilfred in a tone of intense exasperation, "but father couldn't get a foreman dyer for twice what he gives me, and here I am with all the responsibility of the place on my shoulders. He's out practically all day, looking for business—and it takes some looking for nowadays, I can tell you. But there I am with the whole place to look after, and he knows it and trusts it to me. And he's right, too; I know as much as he does about dyeing, any day of the week."

"Your father," observed Charles rebukingly in his grandest pulpit style, "is technically accounted, I believe, one of the most highly skilled men in the West Riding."

"Well, and if he is?" returned Wilfred argumentatively. "I'm not denying it." His sallow face flushed. "I know what I'm saying, Uncle Charles; and I think you know me well enough to know I'm not given to boasting."

"That's true," conceded Charles.

"Well, then!" argued Wilfred. He was not, however, capable of repeating his proud assertion of a moment ago, and went on instead jerkily: "I'm not just a lad about the place now, and father ought to realize it. Only the other day I heard of a job—from a fellow who was round—not half the responsibility I have, and twice the money I'm getting. I don't know how long

father expects me to go on at this twopenny-halfpenny rate, I'm sure. Times are bad, of course; but still! A fellow has to live."

He glared fixedly at the fire during these remarks, and apparently addressed them to the hearth, but it was sufficiently obvious to all the Mellors that his real grievance was his inability to marry on his present salary. Charles felt that there was an awkwardness in discussing this point in his daughter's presence, and strove to give a different turn to the conversation.

"And how does Eric 'frame,' as they say, in the business?" he inquired.

"Eric!" exclaimed Wilfred with good-natured contempt. "He might have been brought up in a china shop for all the use he is. And yet he draws practically the same as I do. It's not fair, you know, Uncle Charles. Besides, I'm so much older than he is, and altogether it's different. Father's a hard man, but he's usually fair, and I wonder he doesn't see it."

"Shall I put it to him on those lines?" Charles suggested soothingly.

"No, thank you!" replied Wilfred sharply, sticking out his lower jaw. "I'll fight my own battles, if you don't mind, Uncle Charles."

"I admire you for that, my boy," said Charles, heartily. "But it would be a great grief to me if you were to quarrel with your father."

"Let him treat me fairly, then," returned Wilfred, unappeased. "I give him good work, Uncle Charles, and I never say a word against

him; and I don't see why I should get nothing but sour looks and poor wages in return."

Charles sighed, and a frown of discomfort ruffled his fine brow. He had seen so many mild young fellows, who regarded their father's tutelage as in all things natural, changed by a love-affair into men with minds of their own, who wanted to stand on their own feet and claim their own place in the world, that he was in no uncertainty as to what was the matter with Wilfred; and at the thought he sighed again and looked extremely unhappy. That Wilfred was now perfectly alive to his father's sarcasms he could not doubt; and, remembering suddenly the temper of Wilfred's mother, Charles began to fear that the future might hold a constant, maddening, soul-destroying clash of wills between father and son. He sighed yet again, and looked for consolation to his wife, but her face was blank and expressionless.

"What about supper, my dear?" he suggested, to relieve the tension.

Without speaking Louise leant forward and rang the bell.

"Eric has always been father's favourite," pursued Wilfred.

"Come, come, Wilfred!" said his uncle in a tone of authority. "This won't do. You say yourself that business takes some looking for nowadays. Can't you imagine that your father's nerves are somewhat on edge during this trying time?"

"Well, that's true enough," conceded Wilfred.

"Not that I should ever have imagined," he observed, sarcastically borrowing his uncle's word, "that father had any nerves."

"Now, Wilfred!" Louise mildly reproved him.

"What do you think about it all, Lydia?" demanded Wilfred abruptly, turning on her.

Lydia was taken aback and did not know what to say. She did not like her uncle, and on that account was always very scrupulous in what she permitted herself to think and say of him. Her heart was all with Wilfred, but her conscience bade her hedge. Before, however, she had time to make up her mind the door opened and Annice created a diversion by appearing with the supper things.

"Well, Annice," observed Wilfred, turning to her, "and what's the matter with you to-night? You left me in the hall without deigning to say as much as good evening to me."

To this Annice replied, "Good evening, sir," dourly, and proceeded to lay the table. She had no smiles to-night, and threw the silver on the table carelessly and without gusto.

Lydia arched her eyebrows in a humorous despair, and began to ask herself whether number seven were bewitched to-night. Wilfred's brow was still black, Louise's attitude could only be called glum, and here was Annice now looking as cross as a couple of sticks. Lydia and her father were evidently alone in the possession of no private grief. She smiled across at Charles, and he, catching her thought, smiled back at her.

"I think we must all have got out on the wrong side of our beds this morning," he suggested with his most ministerial air.

"Very like," agreed Wilfred, morose.

The ensuing pause was broken by a tremendous clatter of falling silver and crashing glass. All three exclaimed, "Annic!" in tones of varying alarm, and sprang to their feet. Lydia turned in time to see the girl stagger and sink to the ground; her eyes were half-closed, and her limp hands had relaxed their grasp; she was undoubtedly fainting.

"Poor child!" cried Lydia, running across the room to her.

Louise, however, was, for once, there before her; she caught the girl in her arms and lowered her gently to the ground. As she fell, Annice's black dress flew back and revealed her round young limbs; Louise drew down the dress with a maternal gesture, while Lydia hung over the prostrate girl, murmuring expressions of sympathy and feeling very useless.

"Open the window, Charles," ordered Louise sharply. "Fan her with that newspaper, Lydia. She'll be all right in a minute."

Annic's red cheeks had indeed lost scarcely any of their brightness, and as she lay there in an easy posture she looked simply cosily asleep. Lydia's heart yearned over her, and she longed to take her in her arms and mother her.

"Poor child!" she repeated. "Poor little thing! She's been working too hard, I suppose."

Louise said nothing. In a moment or two, as she had prophesied, Annice stirred; she moved her arms slightly and opened her eyes with a bewildered air.

"You're all right, dear," Louise at once assured her.

An expression of alarm came over Annice's face; she struggled into a sitting position and passed one hand over her eyes, and her cheek seemed to turn paler. She murmured something about it being silly of her, and something to the effect that she was quite all right now. Louise's arm was still about her waist, supporting her, and Louise's short-sighted eyes were gazing full into her face. Annice averted her head and stared at the carpet.

"Just help me to get her on the sofa, Wilfred," commanded Louise.

Wilfred, anxious to be of use, came gladly forward; but at this the colour returned to Annice's cheeks with a rush; she observed that she could get up quite well by herself, and with the aid of chair-backs and Lydia's arm managed to reach the sofa, where she seated herself on the very edge and glared at them all rather defiantly. After a while she suddenly stood up and began to collect the scattered silver. To Lydia's remonstrance she replied haughtily that she was all right now and would get the supper at once.

"Oh no, Annice!" protested Lydia. "I'll do it."

"You'd much better go to bed, Annice," observed Louise at this point, dryly.

To Lydia's astonishment, Annice dropped the forks at once and vanished without a word.

Lydia proceeded to complete Annice's preparations for supper, and the four ate the meal rather silently together, haunted by the pathetic recollection of the unconscious girl. Nor did the evening become more cheerful for some time. Louise's sombre mood was now too plain to be missed even by her husband, to whom the shadow seemed to have extended itself; while Wilfred's face was still set in lines of such angry determination that his uncle presently felt called upon to make another remonstrance.

"You need to keep a stern watch on your temper, my boy," he told him in a joking tone.

"Aye, so it seems," returned Wilfred, savagely. His uncle looking interrogative, he explained: "I had Eric nearly crying this afternoon."

"What was the matter?" demanded Charles with some severity.

"Oh, he'd forgotten something I'd told him to see after," said Wilfred in a disgusted tone. "You wouldn't understand the details. But you know, Uncle Charles, Eric really doesn't do as he should either in the mill or at home. He's frightfully careless; for instance, he always puts the car out of order if I let him so much as touch it. And he has a head like a sieve; and this afternoon I just told him so, that's all."

His voice sounded aggrieved, and he was obviously deeply hurt by his brother's absurd reception, as he considered it, of a kindly fraternal

rebuke. Lydia could not forbear a soft laugh; Wilfred caught the sound and looked at her in angry astonishment. After a moment or two, however, a smile stole unwillingly over his face. "I reckon you're right, Lydia," he observed in a tone of dry admiration which brought the colour to Lydia's cheeks.

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," Charles seized the opportunity to admonish him.

"Sunset's at four o'clock to-day, Uncle Charles," riposted Wilfred.

His facetiousness, which in earlier days had mildly irritated Lydia, now had a kind of physical dominion over her; alarmed by the sudden intensity of her feelings towards him, she veiled her eyes, sat very still, and said nothing. Her thin breast rose and fell under the stress of this new revelation, and she felt choked by the heat of the room. Wilfred looked at her from time to time with a certain grim satisfaction; suddenly he was in tremendous spirits, and threw off a series of lively sarcastic anecdotes, which he told, if he had only known it, with exactly his father's cynical air. His sallies were interrupted by the sudden entrance of Eric, looking rather miserable; he had found, he said, the front door unlatched and come right in. "Quite right too," said Charles encouragingly. Eric continued to look unhappy and nervous, and, standing uncomfortably on one leg, explained that his father had sent him across. It appeared that the driver of the mill lorry had telephoned to say that he had

had an accident down by the bridge; and something would have to be done about rescuing the wagon and the pieces which formed its load.

"The front wheel's off," concluded Eric, addressing his brother. "And father thinks you'd better go down and see about it."

"I dare say he does," said Wilfred, as grimly as was possible with his mouth full. He got up at once, however. "What I should like to know," he continued, pushing his chair roughly under the table, "is this: why wasn't I told the man hadn't got back from Bradford before I left the mill?"

"I forgot," snuffled Eric, hanging his head sheepishly.

"Forgot! You'll forget your head next," said his brother in affectionate contempt, pushing him from the room. "What's the man think he's doing, anyhow, coming home at this time of the night?"

Eric could be heard in the hall explaining, in the prevaricating and procrastinating manner peculiar to weak souls who have made a mistake and are afraid to admit it, that the driver had had difficulties with the wheel before, in Bradford, and had had to wait there to have it put right.

"Why didn't he telephone and say so, then?" demanded Wilfred, taking down his coat.

"He did," admitted Eric feebly. "That's what I forgot to tell you."

"Nay!" said the exasperated Wilfred. "You really are the limit, Eric. You really are. Did

you tell anyone?" Eric gave a negative sniff. "How did you think he was going to get into the mill-yard, then, I should like to know? Eh?"

"I'm very sorry, Willie," said the hapless Eric. "As a matter of fact," he added with a kind of weak desperation, "it was the mill-yard gate he ran into."

"What!" shouted Wilfred.

"He thought it would be open, you see," pursued Eric in trembling tones. "I'm awfully sorry."

"Sorry!" snorted Wilfred. "Sorry! Good heavens! I dare say you are sorry. Much good that does. However, the thing's done now; it's no use crying about it. The lorry was getting towards the end, anyway. I haven't got the keys," he pursued thoughtfully. "I shall have to telephone. . . . I can't think why on earth you don't have a telephone, Uncle Charles," he shouted crossly through the door.

"We don't live such a busy life as you, my boy," replied Charles soothingly from the table. "We don't need it."

"You're regular back numbers in this house," crumbled Wilfred. "That's what you are." He appeared in the doorway. "Well, good-bye," he said ungraciously. "Thank you for the supper, Aunt Louise."

"You're very welcome," replied Charles to this, waving a hospitable hand to mitigate his wife's silence.

"Good-bye, Lydia," pursued Wilfred in a

rather more cheerful tone, bending a dark and fiery glance on her. "I dare say I'll be round again to-morrow night."

Lydia could not raise her eyes to meet the fire of his, but to show her sympathy with him she observed in her light superior tones: "I hope the lorry isn't badly damaged."

"Oh no!" said Wilfred, good-humouredly sarcastic. "Not at all! A wheel off, and the busiest time of the year for us—that's nothing!" He gave one of his frank wide smiles. "I'll be round to-morrow night," he said. "Good night, everybody."

He departed, pushing Eric in front of him with cheerful brotherly jeers.

Charles, having said grace, went to the fire, and, arranging the long square flaps of his clerical coat, put one foot on the fender thoughtfully. Lydia began to put the plates together, somewhat hampered by her mother, who remained sitting at the table, lost in a dream.

"Wilfred is very like his father at times," mused Charles.

Lydia and Louise said nothing.

"Astonishing how he seems to have inherited his father's technical ability," pursued Charles, "while Eric so entirely lacks it."

"It's not in the least astonishing," snapped Louise, suddenly coming to life. "Wilfred inherits it from both sides, that's all. I've always understood that his mother was an excellent weaver."

"Was she a weaver?" said Lydia, surprised

both by this information and the tone in which it was delivered.

Charles and Louise exchanged glances.

"I'm sure, my dear Lydia," Charles rolled out sonorously, "that you won't think any the worse of her or of Wilfred on that account."

"Of course not," returned Lydia impatiently. "I've never heard it mentioned before, that' all. Wilfred's parentage is nothing to me."

Her manner of uttering this last sentence revealed rather too clearly her feeling against Mr. Dyson, and Charles looked grave.

"I hope," he observed after a minute, ostensibly addressing Louise, "that Wilfred will try to be more tactful with Herbert in future."

"Why, father?" demanded Lydia in some resentment. "Surely the right is on Wilfred's side."

Charles paused a moment to lend his words more weight.

"I think we must admit, Lydia," he then said gravely, "that Eric is your uncle's favourite son. That being so, if Wilfred thwarts or annoys his father too seriously, he may have to leave the business and try his luck elsewhere."

"Perhaps that would be a good thing," suggested Lydia mutinously, collecting spoons. "He mentioned some other post he'd heard of, didn't he?"

"You want to be parted from your cousin, then?" said Charles. "You want him to leave Hudley?" He did not expect answers to these

questions, and continued at once: "Perhaps at some future period it might be well for Wilfred to leave his father, but he ought not to be encouraged to do so, I think, till other aspects of his future are more settled than they are at present—that lorry," he went on without a pause, "might have come a very nasty cropper if the wheel had fallen off in mid-career."

He continued to make conversation about the lorry till Lydia had filled a tray with supper-things and carried it from the room, when he fell silent and smiled at his wife with an air which he thought knowing.

As the girl passed along the hall towards the kitchen she heard Louise say in a troubled voice:

"Don't encourage her to count too much on Wilfred, Charles."

Lydia, pierced to the heart, stood still and listened.

"Why not?" demanded Mr. Mellor sharply.

In an agony of suspense Lydia strained her ears for the reply, but she heard nothing from her mother except a sigh. Charles pressed his question, but Louise was obdurately silent; and after a few long moments their daughter moved on into the kitchen and put down the tray. Her arms trembled from the strain of holding it, and her heart seemed to beat unduly fast. She leaned against the table for support. Louise's sombre mood, which now seemed to connect itself definitely with the Dysons, Annice's inexplicable illness, the glimpse Wilfred had afforded her that

evening of a world where men lost their temper, and quarrelled with their fathers about money—all these wove themselves into something menacing and sinister of which Lydia felt afraid. If Wilfred lived in a world like that—a world so different from the serene and affectionate purlicues of number seven—how could she hope to keep his love, even if she had aroused it? In a flash of insight she saw her own personality as narrow, bloodless, insipid, and unsatisfying; there was nothing in her strong enough for a man to love. Louise evidently shared this view. But that was nonsense, nonsense, Lydia told herself in swift revulsion, as she remembered Wilfred's parting glance; surely he loved her as she loved him, and nothing Dyson could do could part them. Nothing *should* part them, she resolved; Wilfred was her man, her master, her hope of life, and she would cleave to him as long as she should live. She returned to the dining-room and tried to fathom Louise's brooding look; but nothing more was said which bore upon the events of the evening.

Not unnaturally Lydia passed a restless and unhappy night. Sleep was long in coming, and when it came it seemed full of gloomy fantasies, momentary glimpses of a world where everything seemed shadowed by some monstrous secret known only to Louise. At last Lydia fell into a more coherent dream. She was standing in a crowd outside a carved ecclesiastical door, and her heart was broken. There was no doubt about that, for the pain went through her like a sword,

and all the bystanders seemed to agree that it was a pity. They seemed to agree, too—or at any rate a high unearthly tune was sounding through the air to that effect—that she had come there to tell the king the sky was falling. Presently the carved doors opened, and forth came, with every ceremonial proper to a wedding, Wilfred, a bride upon his arm. He looked haggard and unhappy; and Lydia, with that absence of decorum which characterizes dreams, threw herself before him and reproached him for deserting her. “Well, it was your fault,” said a voice beside them. Lydia turned fiercely upon the bride, who had now put back her veil, and saw to her horror that the hated creature bore the round rosy face of Annice. The bystanders—who seemed to act the part of Greek chorus very well, as Lydia was able to observe with amusement, though her heart was undoubtedly broken—uttered some kind of appropriate wail, and Lydia awoke to hear Annice’s voice telling her that it was time to get up.

At first there was an immense relief in realizing that the dream was but a dream; then she was able to laugh at its absurdities; but after that it began to weigh upon her. As she dressed she felt heavy and feverish; and her spirits were not lightened by her discovery that Annice, too, looked heavy and feverish, and had reddened eyelids—as though she had been weeping. Annice would often hover sociably round Lydia while she breakfasted; but this morning, having answered

Lydia's queries as to her health in monosyllables, she withdrew to the kitchen and left Lydia to eat her meal alone, in a gloomy and troubled silence. Now that the shock of her mother's words had receded into the past, Lydia did not doubt Wilfred's love—he had looked so wretched in that dream, poor boy!—but she felt that something, Louise alone knew what, was about to try to part them. What could that something be but Dyson?

All through the day Lydia pondered this, and by the time her work was done and she was returning homewards she had comforted herself by resolving upon a course of action. Charles could do anything with Dyson—so much had been known to Lydia since her childhood. Lydia, then, could ask Charles to go to Dyson and explain the situation. Yes, let Charles explain that his daughter's heart, her happiness, her very life, were bound up in Wilfred; let Charles say that if Dyson had any kindness for his old friend he could show it best by making Lydia happy. It was true that Wilfred had not yet given any definite indication that his happiness was bound up in Lydia's, but Lydia was determined that things should be made clear between them that very night. In deciding this she was not without a merry wish to show Wilfred that all the Mellors were not the back numbers he had represented them to be. She smiled to herself as she thought of how she would do this, and dwelt pleasurably on the charms of a certain new frock in which she

intended to take Wilfred's eye at supper. Dyson could not, should not, prevail against them. Metaphorically she shook her fist at the blazing windows of her uncle's house—none of the Dysons had any decent notions with regard to the drawing of blinds, and Eric habitually left the lights on in any room he quitted—as she passed it, and marched on to number seven with a high spirit and a glowing heart.

By contrast with Boothroyd House number seven looked very gloomy. There was no light in the hall. The door, to Lydia's disgust, was on the latch and would not yield. Imperiously she rang the bell, but the kitchen door did not open, as it usually did on such occasions, to disclose Annice moving towards her with apologetic rapidity in a thin shaft of light. She rang again, and presently, growing impatient, knocked. Then at last a door opened, a light was switched on, and footsteps came towards her along the hall. The latch clicked, the front door swung back, and Lydia found herself confronting her father.

"Where's Annice?" she demanded, disturbed.

"Come in, my dear," said Charles.

"Is Annice ill?" pursued Lydia, obeying.

Charles closed the door behind her carefully. "Your mother is in the study," he said over his shoulder. "You had perhaps better join her."

His voice was grave. Lydia, alarmed, looked at him questioningly, and was not reassured by his face, which bore a look of extreme distress and discomposure.

"Your mother's in the study," repeated Charles, and took her arm to urge her there.

His silvery tones were tremulous and broken, and Lydia began to feel really frightened. "What's the matter, father?" she demanded, halting and looking at him searchingly.

"We have bad news for you, my dear," said poor Charles, evading her glance and urging her on.

A sickening presage of disaster filled Lydia's heart.

"Is it Wilfred?" she demanded, breathless.

Charles shook his head, and in spite of herself Lydia gave a sigh of relief.

"But I'm afraid there is a great deal of trouble in store for all of us," continued Charles unhappily.

They had reached the study door. Lydia went in, and Charles mournfully followed. The room looked extremely dismal, for the fire was low, and one inadequate light struggled alone with the wintry dusk. Louise was sitting by the table with her hands clasped; tears stood in her eyes and her gentle face was full of grief.

"Oh, Lydia!" she exclaimed sorrowfully. "This is a bad day for us."

"What is the matter?" demanded Lydia irritably. She was sufficiently of her generation to be annoyed by any excessive display of feeling.

"It's Annice," explained Louise despairingly.

"I guessed it was Annice," said Lydia in a dry tone. "Well, what's the matter with her? Is she ill?" Reading a dubious negative on their

faces, she exclaimed, startled out of her irritation into horror: "Surely she's not *dead*?"

"No, no," said Louise. She sighed, and brought out mournfully: "It's Eric."

"Eric!" cried Lydia. "*Eric!*" At once she knew the whole story. She sat down angrily on the ancient sofa. "Eric!" she repeated in disgust. "How horrible!"

In deprecating and incoherent sentences Louise spun out the commonplace little story. It appeared that Eric had admired Annice from the very first moment he saw her at the station; and then there was the wireless, and then they had met several times on Annice's evening out, and then Eric had occasionally dropped in of an evening, and then there had been that fatal Sunday night when there was no one in the house and Lydia went to see the fires with Wilfred.

"I didn't feel quite satisfied about it even then," said poor Louise; "I blame myself very deeply." Lydia groaned. If only she or Charles had had Louise's keen perception! It was so characteristic of Mrs. Mellor to observe with intense insight, and do nothing.

Since then, it appeared—— Louise paused, and with an outward flutter of her hands seemed to hint at continuing depths of iniquity.

"I've had my suspicions for some time," she affirmed. Her voice drooped piteously as she murmured circumstantial details. "This afternoon," she concluded on a note of anguish, "Annice came to me and admitted it."

There was a pause. Lydia could not think of anything suitable to say. She supposed that Charles was expecting her to voice a righteous grief at Annice's sin, but she could not summon any such feeling. Her grief was of a different kind, and was composed partly of disgust that Annice should have thrown herself away on such an unworthy lover, and partly of an obscure, dark, and jealous irritation because the union of Eric and Annice had been consummated in the teeth, as it were, of her own tepid love affair. She felt that the feelings of herself and Wilfred were mocked and made of none effect by this so much more ardent and more potent passion. And it was for this that she had used her eloquence beside Foyle Tower! She had used all her moral force to drag Annice away from the soldier, and the result had been to throw her into Eric's arms. Life was strange, she reflected; and was annoyed by the banality of the reflection.

Her unemotional reception of Louise's news had steadied her parents' nerves; Charles ran a smoothing hand over his agitated silvery hair and assumed his favourite position on the hearthrug.

"I have seen Eric," he informed Lydia in his stateliest tones. "And the boy is willing to make proper reparation for his fault."

"Herbert will never allow it," wailed Louise, disturbed at it all.

Charles frowned. "He must and shall," he said emphatically.

A host of literary precedents for the present situation thronged Lydia's mind, but she felt characteristically at sea in the real one.

"What does Annice say?" she demanded curiously. "I mean, what does she seem to think of herself?"

Louise threw out her hands again. "How can you tell what Annice feels?" she said despairingly. "All she says is that she's afraid you'll be vexed."

"Vexed!" repeated Lydia. "Vexed!" She sighed—the inadequate word was indeed what could have been expected from Annice, whose emotional reserve stood in the same ratio to Lydia's as Lydia's to that of Charles and Louise. "Well," continued Lydia crossly, "we needn't be uncomfortable even if the sky *has* fallen." She rose, turned up another light, and attended to the fire. As she knelt before the hearth it struck her abruptly that her words had been an unconscious echo of her last night's dream, and a shudder of foreboding ran through her veins and chilled her heart.

"Eric has promised me," Charles was saying gravely, "that he will tell his father to-night."

Lydia considered this, poker in hand.

"He won't," she said, unable to imagine the wretched Eric mustering courage to confess such a fault to Dyson.

"He has given me his word of honour," protested Charles.

"He won't do it himself," affirmed Lydia, a

certain bitterness in her tone. "He'll get Wilfred to do it for him."

Charles looked startled.

"I hope not," he said in a troubled voice. "I hope not, indeed. I hope not, indeed," he repeated, shaking his head anxiously and looking at Louise.

"He will," repeated Lydia bitterly.

"He can't," said Louise, wiping her eyes, a mild triumph in her tone. "Wilfred's gone to Wolverhampton to see about a new lorry, and he's staying the night. He called in this noon to tell me so."

A look of relief, which seemed to Lydia quite out of proportion to its cause, crossed Charles's face.

"I'm glad of that," he said.

"Where is Annice?" demanded Lydia. Not that she wanted to know, but she felt that she must say something.

"In the kitchen," replied Louise, fitting on her glasses. "It's too cold for her to be anywhere else, you know, isn't it?"

Just then the pseudo-Japanese gong which stood in the hall and summoned the Mellors to all their meals was gently tinkled. All three started guiltily.

"She's evidently got tea ready," whispered Charles with a conspiratorial air.

"Evidently," said Lydia dryly. She wondered irritably whether Charles imagined that Annice's surrender to Eric made her incapable of preparing

tea; and then wondered at her own cynical and unsympathetic attitude towards the disaster. Why she reproached herself, did she feel anger rather than sorrow at Annice's situation? Why did there seem to her something irresistibly comic and yet sinister in the conversation which had just concluded, as though the whole affair were a horrible joke on the part of the Fates? For a moment Lydia almost seemed to hear an echo of their sardonic laughter on the air; then she shook herself free of the obsession and followed her mother into the next room, where Annice had indubitably laid the tea.

The unhappy Mellors partook of it in silence. Charles's brow was furrowed; Louise wept, and tried to conceal her tears; Lydia, exasperated almost to the point of screaming by the glances of commiseration which her parents from time to time rested on her, fixed her eyes on the portrait of the Tolefree ancestor, and ate far more than she really desired out of sheer vexation. When they had all finished they sat on for a long half-hour, embarrassed by the question of how to dispose of the remains of the meal. The ringing of the bell would produce Annice, and none of them wished to see Annice just then. At last Lydia rose abruptly, collected the tea-things, and laid them on the table in the hall. While she was so engaged she heard the handle of the front door turn. Imagining that it was the culprit Eric seeking an entrance, she marched forward, put up the latch, and swung back the door with an

air of judicial severity which would certainly have intimidated poor Eric very considerably if he had been there. It was her uncle, however, who stepped briskly past her into the hall.

"Oh, it's you, Lydia," he said dryly.

Lydia, very much perplexed as to whether her uncle had heard the story of the tragedy or not—her first thought was that he had come to see Charles on the subject, but he looked so calm that she could scarcely credit it—admitted that it was she herself.

"Is your father in?" then inquired Dyson, hanging up his hat.

Lydia, more uncertain than ever as to the extent of her uncle's knowledge, said that he was, and Dyson began to take off his coat. To do this with greater ease he threw down on the table a letter which he had held in his hand; and Lydia, taking a sidelong glance at it, saw that the writing was in the childish and unformed hand of Eric. She gave a deep sigh; obviously the note contained Eric's confession, and an unpleasant scene was at hand. Mr. Dyson, however, hung up his thick new coat in a business-like manner, settled his collar about his neck, picked up the letter, and strode into the dining-room. Lydia, frightened but fascinated, followed him.

"Ah, Herbert," said Charles in his most harmonious and sympathetic tones, half rising. "I'm glad you've come across. Take this chair."

Mr. Dyson, with a sniff, seated himself in the proffered chair and folded his arms.

There was a moment's pause, and Lydia had time to notice, as she had often noticed before, how her uncle's presence made the Mellors look shabby and out of date. Mr. Dyson's dark suit of finest quality, his excellent linen and expensive tie, his monogrammed cuff links, the spruce and severe grooming of his sandy hair, somehow called attention to the creases in her father's clerical black and the untidiness of Louise's fair abundant coils. The hard healthy red of Mr. Dyson's face, too, his fierce grey eyes, bristling short moustache, and aggressive chin, made Charles's pink cheeks, flowing silver hair, and benign expression look childish and unpractical. Lydia was reassured, however, by her uncle's composed and business-like air; perhaps the discussion of Annice's misdemeanour would not be so disagreeable after all.

"What's all this about Eric and that girl of yours?" demanded Dyson at this point abruptly.

"He's told you, then," observed Charles with gravity. "I'm glad of that."

"Keep your gladness till it's wanted," threw out Dyson. His tone was so rough as to be really savage, and Lydia, trembling, realized that his outward calm was deceptive, and that the scene before them was certainly going to be unpleasant. "He hasn't told me," continued Dyson in disgust, holding out Eric's note. "He's written it in a letter. Daren't face me, I suppose. When I got in I found this waiting for me. You'd better read it. Read it, I say!" he shouted suddenly as

Charles made no motion to take the note from his hand. "You'd best read it and see what your sister's son has come to."

"I will read Eric's confession if you wish," said Charles with dignity, keeping his hands firmly clasped round one knee. "But I already know what it contains, and I am sorry to say that it is but too true."

"Oh, it's true, is it?" said Dyson grimly. "Well, it's nice to know it's true." He turned suddenly on his niece, and in a tone of intense irritation commanded: "Shut that door, Lydia."

Lydia hastily complied.

"Lydia, I think, had better leave us," said Charles. He spoke smoothly, but there was a light as of battle in his eye.

"Not much she hadn't!" countered Dyson. "The whole confounded thing is Lydia's fault." At this Lydia advanced into the room and sat down defiantly on the sofa. "What does she want to go about picking up nameless riff-raff for, and introducing them into a decent household to bring trouble on it?" continued her uncle.

"Don't speak so of Annice, Herbert," Louise plucked up spirit to reprove him. "The girl was good enough when she came here."

"Oh, she was, was she?" said Dyson sarcastically. "That's very interesting—or would be if I believed a word of it."

"Herbert," said Mr. Mellor in a dangerously smooth tone, "let us discuss this matter calmly."

"There's nothing to discuss," said Dyson,

It gave me five years' hell, and killed Fanny—that's what the path of duty did for me."

"It gave you Wilfred," Charles reminded him.

"Wilfred!" snorted Dyson. "I could have done very well without Wilfred, Charles, I can assure you. He belongs more to your family than to mine, Wilfred does."

Charles coloured angrily, and his eyes flashed again. "You've no right to say that, Herbert," he told him sharply. "Wilfred's been a good son to you, and you may yet have cause to be thankful for him."

"Well, when I have, I'll let you know," replied Dyson with heavy sarcasm. "Meanwhile you can make the situation clear to that girl of Lydia's. I'll go as far as three hundred pounds for her, provided she leaves Hudley and keeps her mouth shut; but any idea she may have of marrying Eric she can put right out of her head at once, for it won't come to anything. So now you know."

"And you may as well know, Herbert," said Charles, sitting very erect and speaking very distinctly, "that I shall do everything in my power to persuade Eric to do the right thing and marry her."

"By God, you'd better not, Charles," said Dyson with feeling. "Now I warn you, you'd better not. You had the whip-hand of me last time in money affairs, but this time it's mine, and I warn you I shall use it. You draw a nice little income from Boothroyd Mills, you know. If I paid you out of the business, and you had to

invest your money elsewhere at the current rate of interest—well, you couldn't live in *this* house."

"If you've finished insulting me, Herbert," shouted Charles, suddenly maddened out of his ministerial control, "you'd better go."

"Oh, certainly, certainly," said Dyson, regaining his temper as his brother-in-law lost his. "I've made my mind clear on the subject, so I may as well go. I hope it will be a lesson to Lydia not to pick up girls from the streets in the future."

"Herbert!" Louise reproved him.

"Leave my house!" cried Charles, jumping to his feet, beside himself with rage.

"All right, all right—I'm just going," said Dyson in a cheerful tone. He rose, smiled grimly, observed, "Good night to you, Charles," and turned to go. At the door, however, he paused and turned to the Mellors again. "I shall send Eric out of the town for a while," he said, "till all this has blown over; and I'll give the girl up to three hundred pounds gladly; but you can take it from me, Charles, that if ever there comes a day when Eric marries her, that day will be the last of my connection with the Mellors."

"Herbert," broke out Louise, "where do you think Eric is now?"

"How should I know?" demanded Dyson sarcastically. "Unless he's in your kitchen, perhaps. You don't seem to know much of what goes on there."

"You don't think he will have done anything rash?" said Louise, disregarding this.

"How, rash?" demanded Dyson. "Run off with the girl, you mean?"

"No; Annice is in the kitchen, alone," replied Louise, not without dignity. "You don't think that Eric might be so overcome with remorse, and so afraid of you, that he might—do himself some harm?"

"What, Eric? Not likely," replied his father with contempt. "He hasn't got the nerve. No; he'll come in late and try to creep upstairs without me seeing him, I expect."

At this Lydia, who had loathed her uncle, been quelled by his force, and reluctantly pitied him, at intervals during the last half-hour, felt compassion again unwillingly rising in her breast. He had such a very clear idea of the character of his favourite Eric, and as he spoke was so extraordinarily like the elder son whom he despised, that a sense of the cruelty and strangeness of life's devices pressed upon Lydia's heart.

She moved aside to let him pass.

As soon as the front door closed behind him Charles, looking very pale and shaken, spoke from his station by the fire.

"Lydia," he said, "you have heard much of your uncle's story to-night, and no doubt have guessed more." Lydia murmured an assent, and Charles proceeded: "Wilfred does not know it, and it will be best that he never should. I am sure you understand that." Lydia again murmured her agreement. "And now," continued Charles, "anything else which we may wish to

say about this great trouble of ours must be postponed until the morrow. I am due to speak at Ribourne to-night at half-past seven, so I must leave the house at once."

"Oh, father, you're not fit to go!" cried Lydia. "Louise, don't let him."

"I have promised to go," said Charles firmly, "and I have not as yet broken a promise. You will learn as you grow older, Lydia, that the daily round and the common task have to be performed even when we are labouring under a great sorrow."

His pompous and old-fashioned pulpit diction suddenly seemed to Lydia full of pathos. "Poor father!" she thought. "Poor dear! Poor little dear!" She went to him and, putting her arms about his neck, kissed his cheek. Charles returned the caress, and seemed much moved.

"Get my coat, dear," he said at length huskily.

Louise had already brought it, and was warming it by the fire. Lydia fetched her father's notes, and the women between them managed to despatch Charles along Cromwell Place in time to catch the appropriate bus for Ribourne.

When he had gone, Lydia went along the hall towards the kitchen. Her heart was now soft towards Annice, and she reproached herself for her selfish and callous reception of the news of the girl's tragedy. She reproached herself, too, most bitterly for having left Annice alone on that fatal August evening; if she had not deserted her then for Wilfred, this catastrophe might never have occurred. There was the constructing of the

wireless, too; she had idled with Wilfred in the study while Eric was trifling with Annice in the kitchen. Feeling guilty and ashamed, she opened the kitchen door and found Annice sitting by the fire with her arms folded. Her expression was, as usual, serene, but she did not raise her eyes or smile, and Lydia's sense of guilt was deepened.

"Mr. Dyson has been here, Annice," she began gravely.

"Yes, miss," agreed Annice without looking up. "I heard him when I came to fetch away the tea-things."

"He wanted me to say," pursued Lydia, "that I knew something ill of you before you came here, but I would not."

Her tone was warm, loving and conspiratorial, and expressed her genuine feeling in the matter, which was that she had gladly sacrificed truth to friendship. Annice looked up in surprise.

"What ill could you have said?" she demanded rather defiantly.

"Why, Annice," said Lydia, disconcerted, "do you think that your behaviour, down there at the seaside, was all that it ought to have been?"

Annice's blue eyes became round with astonishment.

"Why, Miss Lydia," she murmured, aggrieved, "I only did the same as you."

Lydia, routed, left the kitchen, telling herself that it was but too true. Nor could she altogether disabuse her mind of the idea that there was a

certain parallelism between herself and Annice ever since their arrival at Cromwell Place. Both had sought love; the difference was, as it had been by the sea, that the more Lydia sought it, the more she seemed to throw Annice into its arms.

3

The next few weeks were a feverish nightmare of arguments, remonstrances, pleadings, and threats. The case of Eric and Annice was the topic of the hour and came under discussion whenever two members of the families concerned encountered one another; the only person who had no views on the subject being Annice herself.

After all Dyson did not despatch Eric into solitary exile. Wilfred reached Boothroyd House next day as the two were sitting at their midday meal, and found Eric almost prostrate with nervous emotion and his father looking particularly grim. A very few words from the tearful Eric sufficed to inform Wilfred of the disaster, and he exclaimed with conviction that it was just what he had been fearing all along—he had been a fool to put such faith in Eric's evasions.

"Well, there won't be any more of them," observed Dyson dryly. "Eric's going away for a bit. Get your coat off and sit down quickly, Wilfred, if you want any dinner; we've a train to catch. What have you done about the wagon?"

Wilfred seated himself, sniffed thoughtfully,

and infuriated his father by questioning the wisdom of sending Eric anywhere alone.

"I don't want to discuss the matter with you," Dyson told him grimly. "So don't mention it to me again. And I don't intend anyone but me to know where Eric's going, so you needn't bother yourself about that either."

"All right! I hope there's no girls handy there, that's all," commented Wilfred, unabashed, "or you'll have the whole thing happening over again."

Dyson brought his clenched fist down angrily on the table, causing the hapless Eric to give a frightened start.

"Don't talk to me about it!" he shouted, his sanguine face suddenly empurpled. "Do you hear?"

"I hear all right," returned Wilfred in a defiant tone. "But shouting won't change my opinion."

His father gave him an angry glare; but his respect for Wilfred's common sense was only equalled by the irritation it caused him, and in the event he allowed Eric to remain at home, merely extracting from the cowed lad a promise that he would not go to his uncle's house, and enjoining strict attendance at the mill. Thither Wilfred immediately carried his brother, extracting from him *en route* all the particulars of the story, from Eric's first impression of Annice at the station to Dyson's absolute prohibition of a marriage between them last night. Wilfred's opinion of it was that it was a bad job, very. Lydia would be terribly upset, he was sure. Eric ought to be

thoroughly ashamed of himself, and he hoped he was. Fortunately, however, Eric could make it pretty well all right by marrying Annice promptly.

"But father——" began Eric.

Various people, pursued Wilfred, had various ways of regarding Eric's particular fault. Uncle Charles and Lydia, for instance, would no doubt take the religious view. He himself was not particularly religious, somehow; but in his view and in that of every decent person to get a girl into a hole and leave her like that was impossible, simply impossible.

"You'd never be able to sleep again with that on your conscience, you know, Eric, love," said Wilfred persuasively. "Now would you?"

Eric gave a dubious sigh.

"Annice is a right down good girl," pursued Wilfred, "and nice-looking, too."

"I don't need you to tell me anything about Annice," flashed Eric with sudden spirit, giving his brother an angry glance.

"Well, then, there you are!" agreed Wilfred, nevertheless somewhat disconcerted by this show of force from one whom he regarded as a mere boy. "If you're really fond of her, what more do you want? As for her being not so well educated, and all that, I make nothing of it. We're not so grand ourselves. We must see about a licence and all that sort of thing. The sooner it's done the better."

"But father!" protested Eric again; and he described the truly appalling scene he had had

with Dyson the night before. "He won't let me marry her," he wailed.

"Of course," said Wilfred sensibly, "father's, naturally angry with you just now, and disappointed, and so on, but he'll come round presently, and want you to do the right thing."

Eric shook his head. "He won't," he said with conviction. "You didn't hear him."

So emphatic was he on this point of his father's opposition that at length Wilfred said impatiently: "Well, I'll speak to him myself."

He was as good as his word that same evening, but he did not try the experiment again. The fury of his father's tone and manner as he shouted "That's enough!" at his son's first words daunted even Wilfred; and when he consulted with Charles on the matter, his uncle advised him emphatically not to mention the subject to his father again. He, Charles, would himself bring home Dyson's duty to his conscience.

In pursuance of this plan Charles interviewed Dyson at all possible times and places, and warned him with every possible ministerial solemnity that if he persisted in his present course he would be responsible for the loss of two immortal souls. His brother-in-law received him with sardonic politeness, laughed at his reproofs with apparent good humour, mentioned that the money was waiting for Annice when she wanted it, patted Charles on the back and showed him out. Finding remonstrance of no avail, Charles began after a while to use the threat of exposure;

at this Dyson's brow grew black, and he said that two could play at that game—there was such a thing as the law of libel. The unworldly Charles did not know what to make of this; he felt checked and impotent, and his inability to cope with the situation pained him terribly. He was the more miserable just then because Louise had a bad attack of rheumatism—so bad that she had to retire to bed, and Lydia stayed at home to nurse her. Any indisposition on Louise's part always sent Charles into the depth of depression; and combined with his present trouble it was altogether too much for him. As the days went on and Dyson remained obdurate he began to look pale and haggard, and wore a permanent expression of distress. Lydia grew worried about him, and the kind-hearted Wilfred commented sympathetically on his changed look.

"Why don't you tell Uncle Charles not to bother any more?" said he to Lydia one day as he was arranging an extension of the wireless into Louise's room upstairs. "He won't do any good. I don't think father will ever give in and let Eric marry Annice."

"I don't think he will," agreed Lydia despairingly.

"But he'd forgive him soon enough if he *had* married her," pursued Wilfred.

"Do you think so?" queried Lydia, painfully conscious that she knew more of Dyson's mind than Wilfred did.

"Well, of course!" replied Wilfred rather

bitterly. "What else do you think? Father dotes on Eric—can't bear him out of his sight. He couldn't do without him long. He'd forgive them soon enough if once it was done—couldn't help himself. The best thing for Eric and Annice to do is to get married on their own. After all, Eric's twenty-one. That's what I'm always telling him; they ought simply to go off and get married without asking anybody's permission."

He told it him, indeed, so frequently and with such force that at length the harassed Eric agreed to marry Annice at the Registrar's, without his father's knowledge. Charles, too, was to be left ignorant of the affair till it was over, for fear his conscience would compel him to inform Dyson; nor was the bedridden Louise, who could never keep a secret, told about the scheme, though when skillfully questioned she was able to impart much useful information about other such weddings she had known. Annice gave a monosyllabic assent to the plan, but would not bestir herself in its service, while Eric was nearly distracted by opposing fears; so that the onus of the arrangements fell on Wilfred and Lydia. Letters passed back and forth securing the written consent of Annice's mother, the girl being under age; Wilfred accompanied Eric to the Registrar's to give the requisite notice; Lydia sewed diligently so that Annice might not be cast destitute on her father-in-law's mercies; in a word, they were both so busy preparing, sustaining, and making smooth the way for the younger couple, that they had

not a moment for their own affairs. At times Lydia was glad of this, for she was heartily sick of love as demonstrated by Eric and Annice; but there were other times when she felt resentful at being thus pushed to one side to make room for another woman's story, and at such times Wilfred's matter-of-fact and unlover-like demeanour annoyed her. Her irritation then was rather aggravated than otherwise by Annice's occasional murmurs that it was *very* good of Mr. Wilfred to take so much trouble.

At last the harassing weeks during which Lydia prepared Annice, nursed Louise, and kept the secret from Charles came to an end, and Annice's wedding day arrived one bright wintry morning. The ceremony, such as it was, was to take place at half-past twelve; and there was a good deal of nervous flurry in number seven just before that hour. The unsuspecting Charles was safely occupied with a pupil in the study while Lydia helped Annice to dress in her new clothes; but every time his voice rose in explanation her heart jumped, the more so as Louise's customary moight suddenly seemed to give her some presage of what was about to happen that morning, and she began to put the most searching questions about Annice and Eric whenever her daughter entered the room. Lydia evaded these questions by avoiding her presence, but their nearness to the truth agitated her; and when presently the taxi containing Eric and Wilfred—the car had suffered at Eric's hands a day or two ago and was

absent for repairs—drew up at the back door as had been arranged, and the two girls went out to meet it, feelings of suspense, guilt, worry, and determination jostled each other roughly in Lydia's mind and drew her earnest features into a painful expression of uncertainty and distress. Wilfred, too, looked busy, hurried, and rather dirty, but Eric was spruce and seemed to be enjoying himself—he positively wore a flower in his buttonhole, his hair was for once well-groomed, and he greeted Annice with an eager smile. Annice stepped into the vehicle with her usual air of demure reserve; but as Lydia seated herself beside her she glanced up at the elder girl with a dimple in her cheek and a sparkle in her eye which showed that she too was enjoying the occasion. Lydia, not to dishearten the child on what was after all her wedding day, forced a smile in response and wished earnestly that the taxi, which was impotently throbbing, would begin to move. There was a long minute of suspense, during which all four conspirators felt that the eyes of Cromwell Place, and indeed of all Hudley, were fixed upon them; then the vehicle started forward with a jerk and bore them rapidly past Boothroyd House out of the Place and into the main road.

“Well,” observed the invincibly commonplace Wilfred cheerfully, “we’ve got a fine day for it, anyhow.” He threw himself back in his seat with an air of satisfaction, but Lydia’s heart was in her mouth as they threaded the teeming

traffic. Surely, she thought every other second, that figure there was Dyson's. But no such calamity befell; the taxi turned off into a quieter street and drew up before a brass-plated door without being accosted by any angry father; and a few minutes later, in an upper room, Eric and Annice were formally made man and wife. They seemed remarkably happy about it, and descended the stairs hand in hand. Lydia, on the contrary, now that the excitement was over, felt cross, bored and cynical. It struck her forcibly, as the man shut the door of the taxi behind them, that the Mellors were now without a maid. She must go home at once and resume her household duties. Charles and Louise would shortly require a meal, and shortly after that another meal. Pans must be put on the fire, coals brought up, and registry offices approached; while Annice -- he did not exactly know what Annice and Eric would be doing in the near future, but supposed that Wilfred would come round and tell her the result of their post-marital interview with Dyson.

She did not, however, have to wait as long as that for news, for they encountered her uncle on his own doorstep. Lydia was the first to see him. Wilfred had descended and was helping her out of the car when over his shoulder she caught a glimpse of Dyson's hard red face. He was wearing the taick dark overcoat he affected in the winter, and he carried his usual handsome stick; he was obviously just returning from the mill for his midday meal. Lydia's exclamation made Wilfred

turn his head, and he remained in that position as though turned to stone by the sight of his father. Lydia stepped down and stood beside him, and for a moment it might easily have been supposed that it was this pair which had just been through a clandestine ceremony—indeed, from Dyson's arched eyebrows and cynical smile he evidently suspected them of something of that kind. He leaned on his stick and surveyed them with a certain grim amusement.

"Well, Willie!" he observed in a bantering tone. (Lydia hated to hear Wilfred called by this diminutive.) "This is what you do when you leave the mill early to call round by the bank about the wages, is it? I thought it was a cock-and-bull story when you told it me."

Just then Eric, not realizing what was going on, mildly poked his head out of the taxi. The change in Dyson's expression was so terrible that Lydia involuntarily exclaimed, and Eric shrank back behind the door.

"Eric! What are you hiding behind there for?" shouted Dyson, striking his stick against the paving stones. "Come out of that! Eric!" His son timidly appeared in the doorway again. "What in the name of God are you wearing that for?" demanded Dyson with intense disgust, pointing his stick at the flower in Eric's button-hole. Eric, pale and trembling, could not find a word to say.

"What have you three been up to?" pursued his father, glaring with angry suspicion at each

in turn. "Come! Out with it! You, Wilfred! Can't you speak? You've usually plenty to say for yourself—and so have the Mellors," he added bitingly to Lydia.

At this point Annice, pushing Eric aside with that affectionate contempt which was so marked a feature of her treatment of him, stepped serenely out of the taxi and confronted her father-in-law. The blood rushed to Dyson's face, he shook his stick threateningly in the air, and for a moment or two a furious torrent of oaths and abuse poured madly from his lips. Lydia, horrified by the violence of his speech and voice, suggested primly that they had better go into the house.

"Hold your tongue!" barked Dyson furiously. "It's all your fault for bringing the baggage here—damn her!"

"It's no good you going on like that, father," observed Wilfred at this, reprovingly. "Eric and Annice were married this morning. We've just seen it done."

There was an awful pause, during which the taxi, whose driver evidently thought he was *de trop*, prosaically chugged away down the short drive and halted at the gate.

"By God!" said Dyson at last with the most intense feeling, his face twitching with passion: "Then it's a bad morning for you, Wilfred Dyson. He'd never have done it without you pushing him into it. I know that well enough. Who called on you to interfere? What had it got to do with you, I'd like to know?"

"It was the right thing for Eric to do, father," said Wilfred soberly.

"Oh, it was, was it?" shouted Dyson, advancing upon him. "You think so, do you? Then let me tell you we've had enough of that sort of right thing in this family. I did the right thing by *your* mother, Master Wilfred, and I got five years' hell out of it until she drank herself to death. It ruined my whole life—I've never ceased to regret it. And now you come along and push Eric into the same ghastly blunder."

"I didn't push Eric into making love to Annice," protested Wilfred, turning very pale.

"No; that was Lydia's fault; we've Lydia to thank for that," said Dyson savagely, turning on his niece his bloodshot eyes and working face. "Perhaps you remember what I said to your father on that subject, do you? Well, I meant it, every word; and so you'll find before you're very much older."

"Father knows nothing about the marriage, Uncle Herbert," the trembling Lydia plucked up courage to say.

"Does Uncle Charles know what you told me just now about my mother?" demanded Wilfred in a strained tone.

"Why, you fool!" shouted his father, losing all control, "it was *he* who drove me into doing it. He said it was the right thing to do, just like you've done now to poor Eric here. I should never have done it but for him, I can tell you; I'd more sense."

"If my mother wasn't good enough for you, I reckon I'm not," cried the maddened Wilfred suddenly.

"Aye, you're right there!" sneered Dyson, shaking with fury; "you aren't. Or perhaps you're too good; I don't know which. Anyhow, the result's the same: we don't just suit each other, I'm thinking."

"I'll clear out then," said Wilfred thickly, tears standing in his brown eyes. "I'm sure I don't want to stay where I'm not wanted."

He turned on his heel and flung him self down the drive, but at the gate the taxi-driver accosted him, and he was obliged to halt and draw out silver from his pocket for the fare. He was so shaken that this process took some time.

"Aye! You can clear out right now and never come back again," Dyson taunted him. "I never want to set eyes on you again. So now you know."

"It wasn't his fault, Mr. Dyson," observed Annice mildly at this point.

"Annice!" exclaimed Eric jealously, turning to her.

"It was Eric's and my fault," pursued Annice, "not Mr. Wilfred's."

"You leave Wilfred alone, Annice," said Eric, colouring. "Wilfred's nothing to do with you."

"I only said it wasn't his fault, that's all," persisted Annice, with a friendly glance towards Lydia.

"You needn't quarrel about whose fault it was," shouted Dyson, enraged both by Annice's

pleading for Wilfred and by her obvious over Eric. "You're all pretty well tarred same brush, if you ask me; and I've done the lot of you. You can tell your father me, Lydia, with my compliments; and as to two boys, such devoted brothers as you as you've found another address you can Mrs. Lumb for your clothes. I won't give those, but you needn't come to the house or to the mill either. I've done with you."

He abruptly entered the house and the door behind him.

"I knew it!" exclaimed Eric, weeping, he would be like this. I *told* Wilfred so. What we do now?"

"Well, never mind," began Ann solingly, taking his arm.

Lydia left them and went in pursuit of who had now satisfied the chauffeur striding rapidly away down the main road

"Wilfred!" she called; "Wilfred!"

"Well, what is it?" demanded Wilfred turning on her. "What do you want?"

He looked white and sick, and Lydia's strong desire to put her arms about him to comfort him. Such an action was, however, utter impossibility on her part, and she contented herself with pleading hurriedly: "I'll be away, Wilfred; come back with me to-morrow evening. Do come. You know you're always there. Do come."

"What's the use?" said Wilfred

resuming his stride. "No! I shall get out of Hudley as quick as I can. The town isn't big enough to hold me and father. The West Riding isn't. I shall go to Scotland, to the job that fellow was telling me about. You can say good-bye to Uncle Charles for me. I dare say he meant well, but it would have been better if he'd told me all about that past history; I should have cleared out then without father having to tell me to go."

"Oh, Wilfred!" panted Lydia, striving to keep up with his rapid steps, "don't go! Please don't go!" She made a tremendous effort to conquer her own reserve and, laying a timid hand on his sleeve, said desperately: "I shall miss you terribly if you go, Wilfred."

A softened look crossed Wilfred's unhappy face; he hesitated and slackened speed somewhat. Unfortunately this allowed Eric and Annice to overtake them.

"What are we to do now, Willie?" wailed Eric as they arrived.

Wilfred scowled again. He turned to face his brother, and the four stood silent for a moment. The heaviness of Annice's figure was apparent to Lydia for the first time that day, and she perceived that Wilfred too was painfully aware of it.

"You'd better all come to number seven," suggested Lydia with an effort, conscious of a decided disinclination to harbour Eric, whose moist eyes, degenerate-looking head, and sham-

bling gait were just then very disagreeable to her. To her surprise, her suggestion was not well received; Wilfred's scowl deepened, and Annice shook her head. "Why not?" Lydia demanded, surprised. "I don't see where else you can go."

"Neither do I," wailed the hapless Eric. "I *knew* how it would be."

"Annice is right," interrupted Wilfred sharply. "Father will never forgive you if you go to Uncle Charles. It's very nice of Lydia," he went on sarcastically, "to want us all so much, but it won't do. You'll have to find some rooms for a bit, till father comes round."

"I haven't any money," objected Eric in despair.

"We shall manage," Annice consoled him.

"No, we *shan't*," said Eric peevishly. "You know nothing about it."

"Here!" said Wilfred in a tone of intense disgust, getting out his note-case, "take this." The money changed hands, and Wilfred added: "I'll send you my address when I'm settled, and you can let me know how you're getting on. And mind," he finished roughly, "that you're good to Annice, Eric."

Eric coloured with anger. "I don't need you to tell me how to behave to Annice, Willie," he retorted in a resentful tone.

"My God!" said Wilfred, exploding. "You're beyond a joke, Eric, you are really. However, it won't matter to me any more; I'm off. I'm sick of

the whole lot of you, and I hope I never see any of you again." He swung on his heel and strode off in the direction of a passing tram.

"Good-bye, Wilfred," said Lydia faintly, taking a timid step or two after him.

"Good-bye," replied Wilfred shortly. "Don't come any farther, Lydia. It's no use. I'm sick of all that sort of thing."

He did not turn his head, and his tone was so grim that Lydia's heart failed her, and she halted. She understood him to mean that he was sick of sex, of women and of love as these had been exemplified in the Dyson family, and the sentiment found a sufficient echo in her own heart to keep her motionless while he boarded the tram and was borne away. Her last glimpse of him was as he stood white and scowling on the platform of the tram and counted out coppers to the conductor. It was Wilfred's fate to be prosaic, she reflected, and turned to the wrangle which was in progress between Eric and Annice as to where they should go. Eric wanted to try to soften his father's heart immediately, or alternatively to quarter himself on his uncle; Annice was quite emphatic that neither of these things would do. They did not trouble to lower their voices, and passers-by were glancing at the trio curiously.

"Let us walk on," urged Lydia, taking Annice's arm.

"There's no need for you to stay, Mrs Lydia," said Annice, hanging back. "Eric and I can

manage by ourselves now, and Mr. Mellor will be wanting his lunch."

"Well!" cried Lydia. She jerked her hand from beneath her companion's arm as if it had been stung. To be told, after losing Wilfred solely and entirely through Annice's agency, that Annice no longer needed her, was rather more than she could stand. "Very well!" she continued, her voice panting and uneven with emotion. "If you don't need me, I'll go home. You can do exactly as you like, exactly!"

Annice opened her blue eyes wide in perplexity, and Lydia felt that once again she had been ineffective. It was undeniable, however, that her household duties imperatively called her, and throwing over her shoulder a suggestion that the bridal pair should go to a former housekeeper of Dyson's till things settled down, she hurried off. It was now long past the Mellors' usual lunch hour, and she entered number seven apprehensively. She found that Charles, having passed through various stages of alarm and resignation at the continued absence of herself and Annice, had at last gone into the kitchen, filled a pan or two with water, got up the cold meat from the cellar, and was now engaged in setting a tray for Louise, who, he informed Lydia with a twinkle in his eye, was having a nice little sleep, though she probably didn't think so. The sight of him patiently laying out spoons and forks with his unaccustomed fingers upset Lydia.

"You're very good, father," she said in a

quivering voice, taking off her hat and coat. The little kitchen mirror reflected her disordered hair and her thin features pinched with misery and cold; it was no wonder, she told herself with bitterness, that Wilfred had found it so easy to part from her. "You're very good, father," she said again, moving stormily about her duties. "You're always so ready to put your shoulder to the wheel to help somebody else. It's odd how all the work of the world seems to fall on some people and all the pleasure on others."

"It would be odd," agreed Charles pleasantly, taking out the butter, "if it were true." He of course saw that some catastrophe had occurred in which his daughter was concerned, and he was troubled about the absence of Annice, but he had sufficient experience of human nature to refrain from questions and wait for Lydia to give him her confidence unasked. In his experience confidences so given were always fuller and less grudging than those extracted by the confidant. He therefore turned the conversation to Louise's lunch, which Lydia was rapidly preparing in a jerky and distraught fashion. Presently the two carried this upstairs, and found Louise placidly awake and propped against her pillows in readiness for her long-overdue meal, which she received with signs of pleasure.

"Any deficiencies in equipment," observed Charles, gazing down at the tray, which Lydia was arranging across her mother's knees, "must be attributed to me. *I* laid out the spoons."

"Always a worker, Charles," said Louise smiling up at him fondly.

"Yes!" broke out Lydia bitterly, her thoughts still busy with herself and Annice. "Some people are always the workers. It seems to me there's a vertical line down the middle of society in every generation some people are born to do and others to make it possible for them to do."

"Well, my dear," said Louise soothingly, understanding the cause of this outburst in at least: "It takes all sorts to make a world go on." "I know."

"Louise!" cried Lydia, struck to the heart by the cruelty of this platitude—her mother thought it right, then, that Annice's love should be crowned at the expense of hers! She then remembered that Louise knew nothing of her cause and sorrow. "Mother," she told her with a cold wild dignity, "you don't understand. Eric and Annice are married and Wilfred's gone. He quarrelled with Uncle Herbert and gone. He left me."

Her voice broke as she spoke these last dreary words. In a passion of grief she threw herself down beside the bed and sobbed out the details of the events of the morning.



IV

INTERIM

I

THE Mellors spent the next twelve months adjusting themselves to the changed conditions of their lives. By the next post there came from Dyson's lawyer a legal notice to quit the house at the term of their lease, which was not far distant, and a cheque for the total amount of money invested by Charles from time to time in Boothroyd Mills, with the current quarter's interest added in full. Charles promptly sought an interview with his brother-in-law, but was denied admittance both at the house and at the mill; he wrote to him, and received a formal intimation from the solicitor that any further business between the Mellors and Mr. Dyson was to be conducted through his office. At this Charles, angered, returned the current quarter's interest to the solicitor; and received in return a cheque for the exact amount of interest due, calculated to the very day and the nearest penny. The cheque was, of course, made out by Dyson; and Charles shook his silvery head mournfully over his brother-in-law's emphatic signature.

That his lifelong friend, his sister's husband, could put his name to such a piece of bitterness passed Mr. Mellor's understanding. He pored over the writing, trying to discover signs of agitation in it—there was a rumour current that Dyson was ill, and Charles longed to find corroboration for this, so that he might be able to imagine that his friend was not himself when he did these revengeful deeds. The signature, however, looked firm enough; and Lydia, seeing her uncle one day in the Place, could not support the theory of illness—he passed her without a sign of recognition, certainly, and was walking very slowly, but he looked as robust, as prosperous, and as composed as ever. Charles, with a sigh, paid the second cheque into his bank, and took advice on how to reinvest the money. He found, to his dismay, that the only investments his banker recommended as being safe would bring him in about a third as much as Dyson had recently paid him. Industry was in a bad way generally, according to this gloomy individual, and unless Mr. Mellor wanted such shares as so-and-so and so-and-so—Charles waved a horrified hand in negation—he would be well advised to stick to trustee securities. Of course, Mr. Mellor might get recommendations more to his liking from a stockbroker. The inexperienced Charles shuddered at the mere mention of such a personage, and went away thoughtfully to discuss the matter with Louise. Louise, of course, knew nothing about it, but produced several alarming anecdotes

of people whose money had been caused to vir-
tually evaporate by frequent recourse to stockbrokers;
and I even felt a similar distrust of them; so that
Charles presently bowed to the inevitable and
took his banker's advice. The filling up of the
necessary forms of application was a great
trouble to him; Dyson had always done that sort
of thing for him, until recent years, when Wilfred
had taken it on. Lately, indeed, Wilfred had
filled up Charles's income-tax returns for him and
paid his rates for him and explained Anne's
insurance card to Louise, and done all sorts of
things of that kind for the Mellors. (In some
curious way Wilfred, though his language about
forms of every kind was atrocious, and he always
declared himself utterly unable to understand
what on earth the Government wanted to know
that for, was most expert in filling them up;
whereas Charles, who understood the Govern-
ment's reasons perfectly and never grumbled,
somehow never seemed to put the information
in the proper shape.) Yes, Charles would miss
Wilfred and Dyson very much in many, many
ways; no one knew better than Charles what a
difference it made to his income when Wilfred
looked after the official calls on it. But just now, of
course, all such minor differences were swallowed
up in the great and terrible difference that he
was now drawing a safe 5 per cent. where before
he had had a varying 10 to 15. Obviously he
would have to return to the regular ministry,
especially as Louise's rheumatism seemed likely

to run away with a good deal—an increasing deal—of money.

When he communicated this decision to Lydia, she wept, and reproached herself bitterly for having, by her introduction of Annice, brought ruin on the family. She was rather apt to give way to such self-reproaches nowadays; Charles always replied to them by assuring her, with absolute sincerity, that she had acted rightly, or at any rate as he would have wished his daughter to act, throughout. Lydia was also rather apt to weep nowadays, and Charles knew well to what should be attributed her frequent tears, her listlessness, her general languor, and lack of appetite. The early morning and the middle of the afternoon were for some reason the worst times for her. When she awoke in the morning she would lie still—warm, cosy, happy—until gradually a feeling of uneasiness crept into her mind, and she remembered that something was wrong. Presently, with a start, she remembered what it was. Then she began softly to cry; and, although she took herself severely in hand, rose promptly, dressed with precision and applied herself at once to some task, tears constantly filled her eyes and rolled heavily down her cheeks. Fresh air and the company of people who did not know her enabled her to conquer her weakness for a time, but in the afternoon a dreariness came over her which was almost more than she could bear. The wan, cold light of the spring afternoons, with its hint of

flowers and summer and joy to come—a summer which would mock her blighted hopes, a joy which she could not share—*she* turned and depressed her; the sight of hosts of young girls moving about between the Portico doors, busy and happy, each with her own life, her own man at home to love, made Lucia wretched. She felt that she had been cast aside by life into the backwater of Chancery Place and would never get out again; she felt that her pin-point adventure in love was stamped upon her face and that all these lively young people saw it there and despised her for it. At times she permitted herself to dream that Wilfred would return to her, and for a few days she would live in a state of expectation, welcome the postman eagerly, stir nervously in her chair when footsteps were heard along the Place, and tell herself each night that Wilfred would be sure to come on the morrow. Then after a series of such thwarted days—for Wilfred neither came nor wrote—some slight additional disappointment would send her hopes crashing to the ground; she would spend a wakeful night of misery, to sing and sobbing through the small dark hours, and in the morning come down—her face drawn, her lips compressed—resolutely determined that she would put all that out of her life and forget Wilfred utterly. This resolution she would keep through a few stern days, and then some slight meaningless incident would occur—a young dog barked, a small bird flew from tree to tree, a heavy cloud moved swiftly across the

stormy evening sky, the lamplight was reflected in the wet streets, Louise dropped her glasses and smiled lovingly as Lydia picked them up—the merest trifle was enough; and somehow Lydia's heart was straightway warm and full of confidence. Surely he would return to her! For a day or so she was bright, happy, loving; then perhaps Eric would come whining to his uncle for more money, or Louise's knee would be more painful, and Lydia was plunged back into her dark despondency again.

Charles's cure for all this was, firstly, change of scene and work, and, secondly, to write to Wilfred. Wilfred's address was obtained through the medium of Dyson's housekeeper, the meek Mrs. Lumb, to whom he had written for his belongings; it appeared that he had really gone to Scotland, and was, in fact, in a textile mill in Hawick. He had a moderately good job there—at any rate, for a month or so he managed to send Eric money fairly regularly. At first Charles wrote to him quite often in his friendly flowing fashion, giving him Eric's various addresses, regretting his hasty departure, begging him to keep in touch with the Mellors, offering him sound moral advice on how to get on in life, and so on. Charles was not the kind of person to inform any young man that his daughter was breaking her heart for him, but he spoke of Lydia in terms that would have made her state of mind sufficiently clear to any man who loved her. To none of these communications did he receive any reply. "Write to him

yourself, my dear," he said to Lydia at last, beginning to fear that there were really some away for her. Thus encouraged, Lydia took a pen in hand. But she found the letter very difficult to compose. She had nothing to say to Wilfred except that she loved him, and she did not know how to say that; so the letter, when at last it was despatched, was a stiff little affair full of fact and short sentences—to a man of imagination, she might have cried her heart out at, for Wilfred was not that, and this letter, too, remained unread. About this time Eric began to complain subtly that Wilfred had not written to him for ages, and Charles's next letter to Hawick came back marked "not known here." After that it was generally felt in the Mellor family that Wilfred was irrevocably lost, and Lydia—poor child!—would have to get over it.

Charles flattered himself that his first remedy was more potent in this respect than his second. Having applied to the Conference for remittance, he duly received it, and was promptly called to duties in Ribourne, a suburb which stood on the longest and steepest of the many hills rising out of Hudley. The bustle of moving certainly roused Lydia, and both she and Louse liked their new and pleasant little house, which on one side looked on to the busy main road and on the other over steeply sloping fields to a wide panorama of rolling hills and dales. By night their view was a perfect fairyland of scattered lights, at which Louse was never tired of looking;

she decidedly preferred the heights of Ribourne to the comfort of Cromwell Place, though Charles found the hill rather trying. The previous minister, however, had lately died after a long period of illness and comparative inactivity, and Charles became immensely popular in his new charge. His sterling worth was soon recognized, his oratorical sermons were admired, his simple kindness was loved, and his fondness for a good joke highly appreciated. Louise's rheumatism, though just now rather improved, was understood to debar her from any great participation in feminine chapel activities, and this was highly pleasing to some active spirits who had long controlled them, the general opinion being that Mrs. Mellor was terribly dreamy but so sweet and, of course, *most* refined. Lydia came in for some glory reflected from her father, and some of her own; she was found to be punctual, methodical and particular, and the older people liked her; while the younger ones accepted her as Miss Mellor, a hopelessly old-fashioned and ridiculously strict, but, of course, kindly and *most* worthy person whom one heartily respected. As Lydia had too much pride to reveal the fact that she had a grief to these new acquaintances, Charles imagined that her troubled heart was becoming soothed; but in reality her loss of Wilfred was still an open wound on which the attitude of her contemporaries struck like a lash. She kept this to herself, however, just as Charles and Louise kept their sense of lost liberty to

themselves; and the only visible disadvantages of the Mellors' new life was that Charles's hair grew thin, and he began to look much older and he rather short of breath; also he sometimes sighed as though he were very much fatigued—on Sunday nights, for example, or after a visit from Eric.

Unfortunately these were only too frequent at first. He soon exhausted the money Wilfred had given him on his wedding-day, and came to his uncle, almost weeping, for more. Charles, with a sigh and a little management, gave him some, and gave him also much sound advice as to getting work immediately. Eric heartily agreed; it was just what Annie was always saying, he told his uncle with a pleased smile. In a week or so he arrived at Ribourne in high glee—he had got a job. In another week he came in for to say that he had lost it. Thereafter it he repeated with increasing frequency, for the intervals between the jobs grew longer and the duration of them shorter as the months went on. Each time he came for a loan he seemed more astonished at his own ill-luck, and observed in slow surprised tones that it was really most unfortunate, but he was out of work and Annie wondered whether his uncle would lend them a pound or two to tide them over. Each time this sentence came out Charles, pacing anxiously up and down his tiny study, shook his silvery head and told his nephew emphatically that this must positively be the last time he lent him money. Charles couldn't afford to help

him any more. His pocket would not stand the constant strain. There was Lydia to think of. There was Louie's rheumatism, which had taken a bad turn again. Eric must learn to stand on his own feet, and provide for his own wife and family. This sort of thing was most unsatisfactory. "It's not my way, Eric," Charles told him earnestly, "and it's not your father's way." Eric agreed heartily that it wasn't. "If Wilfred can get a post and keep himself," pursued Charles, "why can't you?" At the mention of Wilfred, Eric's face never failed to cloud, and he muttered something about its being all Wilfred's fault. At this Charles paused in his pacing and, looking sternly at his nephew, indicated with unmistakable plainness where the fault really lay. Eric, colouring, shifted uneasily in his chair and murmured that in that case he didn't know what they should do, really; he hadn't been employed long enough to draw the dole. At this Charles positively bounded with indignation; the dole indeed! The interview always ended in the transference of treasury notes from Charles's pocket to Eric's, for Charles felt the responsibility of his sister's son acutely. After giving his nephew a really severe lecture on his duties in life, he usually invited him to stay to the next meal; the unabashed Eric ate largely and with great good humour, and left promising to do his utmost to find work. As his father had many business connections, who were not unwilling to do Herbert Dyson a good turn and did not believe in the permanence

of his break with Eric, the lad was not without resources in this respect; but no business connection could tolerate Eric long, and each job he found seemed slightly worse than the last one. The lodgings in which he accommodated his wife naturally kept pace with the deterioration of his earnings. When Lydia went to see the pair, however—as she did from a sense of duty only, for she dreaded any reminder of Wilfred, and the thought of Annice's pregnancy was particularly distasteful to her—she always found them astonishingly happy. Their room was usually in a horrible muddle and rather dirty, and that their provisions were at a low ebb was shown by the eagerness with which they received the food Lydia brought, but Annice always looked perfectly healthy and serene, and happiness positively oozed out of Eric's moist eyes and bluish, child-like smile. They never snapped at one another, they never fidgeted, they never seemed in a hurry, they never grumbled; they simply took Charles's money with contented smiles and enjoyed the process of being alive. Charles and Lydia always came away from them feeling depressed and somehow as though they had been put in the wrong; Louise, on the contrary, seemed to enjoy visiting Annice thoroughly, and took a serious interest in the necessary preparations for the birth of her child. Louise's rheumatism, however, had now invaded and crippled to some extent her hands, while Annice was a poor needlewoman; so that the brunt of these prepara-

tions fell, as usual, on Lydia, who performed the task with a savage conscientiousness.

At length one night, after a period of several weeks' unemployment, Eric turned up with a bright face and announced that he had decided to go to Barnsley—Annice's relations lived there, he explained, and knew of an opening for him. Charles looked exceedingly dubious over this proposal. What kind of an opening was it? Where did Eric propose to live? What would Annice do about her coming confinement? Eric seemed vague on these points, but said that Annice wanted to go, as though that settled it. Charles pursed his lips and shook his head; he did not like the idea of "losing the end," as he put it, of his nephew in this way at all. Lydia, on the contrary, felt that if only Eric and Annice would remove themselves out of sight and hearing she might begin to forget Wilfred and take up the threads of life with some degree of resignation. Privately she surmised that if it came to a tussle between Charles and Annice as to the place of Eric's abode, Annice would win; and this belief was shortly afterwards justified, for the pair departed to Barnsley. Charles, of course, worried about them a good deal, and wrote long advisory letters, to which Eric occasionally replied in vague and illiterate scrawls.

Mr. Mellor had not long to be troubled by these, however. Another month brought the news of the birth of Annice's child, who, if Eric's accounts were to be believed, was an

exceptionally fine and healthy boy. With a probably accidental tactfulness Annie decreed that he should be called Herbert Eric. When Charles heard this, he caused an announcement of the birth to be inserted in the *Hudley* paper, and sent a marked copy to Dyson with his own hand. It then appeared to the Millers that the Dyson affair followed the normal course of such affairs, the course—*à l'Américain* reflected bitterly—prognosticated by Wilfred; for they heard that the father had visited his daughter, inspected his grandson, become reconciled to his daughter-in-law, and brought them all home back home with him. When this story was substantiated by an authentic report that Eric, Annie and the baby were undoubtedly quartered in Boston and Haver—*the* pram had been seen in the capital—*and* that of relief arose from all the Millers. Charles, indeed, was overjoyed and entertained hopes of a general reconciliation; Izzy, on the contrary, who felt that Dyson would never be reconciled with Wilfred, and so with her father and her uncle. When, therefore, a short note, probably dictated by Dyson, came from London, bearing two or three points—, chiefly all in direct contrast to—*in* remembrance of 'quick' her, and saying that his father had forbidden him to have any further intercourse with the Millers, Charles was very much upset, but Izzy rejoiced. Let her never see a Dyson or hear the name again, she prayed, and she would perhaps be just tolerable.

2

Five years passed in which this prayer was more or less granted, for the Mellors' news of the Dysons was obtained by hearsay only. Announcements of the birth of Annice's children appeared in the *Hudley News* at regular intervals, and Charles was aware that he had two great-nephews—Herbert Eric and John Francis, respectively—and a great-niece, Dorothea. He had never, however, seen these infants in the flesh. Lydia occasionally caught sight of Annice across the street in Hudley, wheeling a pram and conducting an untidy, heavy-faced child or so by one hand; but on these occasions Lydia always withdrew down a side-street till they passed by. As regards Dyson during this period, rumour said at rather frequent intervals that he was "not so well"; and he certainly retired from the Hudley Choral Society without any other apparent cause. The wagons of Messrs. Herbert Dyson & Co. occasionally thundered up and down Ribourne Hill on their proper errands; and as time went on Lydia received a vague impression that their paint was rather less glossy than of yore and the piles of pieces which they carried rather less high. Wilfred continued to be lost in the void, and other news of the Dysons there was none.

To the Mellors nothing whatever happened except the passage of time and the inevitable changes it brought. Louise's rheumatism became

a settled fact; Lydia gave up any idea of paid work in the daytime and instead managed the household and carried on such good works as were not incompatible with the care of Louise. Charles was invited to stay a second term at Ribourne, and accepted; he was happy there, and was glad not to have to cope with a new charge. He had already begun to feel that his many extraneous activities were more than he could manage in addition to his ministerial duties, and gradually gave most of them up. This diminished the family income rather tiresomely, and Lydia was glad to supplement it by various evening activities—for instance, by speaking to small local societies on serious social subjects. Her addresses, delivered in her light monotonous tones, were sound and accurate, but dull; she was much respected, but not, perhaps, very much enjoyed.

For by the end of the five years following Wilfred's departure, Lydia, in the opinion of those who met her, belonged definitely to a certain well-known type of spinster. Abstinence had indeed sown its sand over her whole personality. Her manner was prim and colourless—she had practised that, to conceal the secret of her grief, so long that it had become a habit with her; and she was so conscious of her own undeserved suffering that her simple face wore a rather naïvely superior expression. Her olive complexion was fading into sallow; her figure, instead of becoming rounded with maturity, had settled into an

angular sharpness; her gait was now always the rather absurdly jerky and hurried one so detested by her uncle. Her brown eyes were still large and fine, but they looked out from between rather scanty and dusty eyelashes. These years, too, had thinned her abundant dark hair and given it a somewhat straggling appearance; friends were constantly "taking the liberty to suggest" that she should wear it short; but Lydia thought short hair undignified—Annice had short hair. Lydia had never had good taste in millinery, and this refusal to conform to current styles in hairdressing made things worse, for her hats balanced themselves precariously on her head at an angle which lent itself to ridicule. She refused to conform, too, to many of the current conventions in dress, saying that they were indecent and outrageous and really too absurd. (She had lately taken, for instance, to wearing glasses, and she characteristically objected to all the latest types and clung to an uncomfortable and out-of-date shape which she defended against all comers.) These various idiosyncrasies caused her, in spite of her personal spotlessness, to look like a rather frowsy print from a Victorian fashion paper, and she was as severe about modern manners as about modern dress. Yet whenever she gave vent to these caustic criticisms of hers she felt a deep hurt within herself, a sharp stabbing pain which made her all the more irritable and obstinate in defending them. If she had only known it, this rage against modernity

was really her protest against the way the youthful Annice had elbowed her aside from life. Sometimes at night in the silence of her room she admitted to herself that she did not really think as badly of the young people of the day as she pretended; with tears she would repent of her harshness and vow to be particularly kind on the morrow. When she had thus taken herself to task she could control her actions, but her words she could not control, and in spite of herself when the morrow came some biting saying would fly out at the slim young thing talking to her, whose love affair was perhaps going so well just then. Lydia had indeed a complex about love affairs; whenever one was mentioned a dark angry flood of pain seemed to rise in her heart—Annice had a child, but Lydia had never had even a kiss from her lover—she longed to say something cruel, with a great effort restrained herself, forced her lips into a bitter smile and began some artificially kindly remark which turned acid before the end of the sentence. Afterwards she was ashamed of herself and would go out of her way to do a kindness to the young people concerned. She had similar complexes about the words "uncle" and "cousin"; she was not fond of talking about West Riding choirs until Dyson resigned from the Choral Society, when her interest in the Yorkshire love of music increased wonderfully; while any allusion to Scotland rankled in her bosom for the day. It was, in fact, generally understood in Ribourne that Miss Mellor had a

sharp tongue but a heart of gold—what a pity, said the Ribourne elders, that she had never married! She would have made some man such a good wife. As it was, of course, she was obviously marked out by destiny to be an old maid.

V

RECALL

I

It was on one of the wettest nights of an exceptionally wet winter that communications between the Mellor and Dyson families were resumed. There was a ring at the Mellors' front-door bell; as it chanced the maid was out, and Lydia rose from the game of draughts she was playing with her father to go to the door. When she opened it the figure of Annice, with a child in her arms, was revealed against a background of dripping buildings and driving rain. The scene was so like that of the return of a prodigal that Lydia's heart was instantly touched; she exclaimed, "Come in!" with a cordial inflexion, and stood aside to let Annice pass. Annice stepped in, and was seen to be soaked. Lydia noticed at once that her figure was fuller and her features heavier than of yore; she was rather shabbily dressed in a purple coat, much too tight for her, and a faded straw hat, both of which now glistened with rain. In one arm she enfolded a bundle, pinned with a heavy brooch into a bedraggled grey shawl; from its shape this was presumably Dorothea.

In the other hand she carried a battered brown attaché case which seemed on the point of disintegrating, under the assaults of the rain, into the paper of which it was originally composed.

"How wet you are! and the baby!" exclaimed Lydia, full of solicitude. She touched the grey bundle gingerly. "Come to the fire," she invited, and urged the pair towards the dining-room. "It's Annice, father," she explained, ushering them in.

"Annice!" exclaimed Charles in astonishment, while Louise gave an eager smile. Charles coloured and rose. "Is Eric here, then?" he asked, looking rather bewildered.

"No—Eric hasn't come," observed Annice serenely. After a pause she added with her most matter-of-fact air: "I've come to spend the night with you."

The three Mellors stared at her open-mouthed, too surprised to speak. Charles was the first to recover himself.

"You are always welcome here, Annice, of course," he observed in stately tones.

"I was obliged to bring Dorothy," said Annice rather defiantly, as if she suspected Charles of excluding the child from his welcome.

"Of course, of course!" said Charles.

"I couldn't leave her at home," pursued Annice.

"No, no!" agreed Charles heartily. "Of course not. Take off your things, my dear, and sit down. Your aunt will hold the child for you, no doubt."

At this the gold brooch was unpinned, and

Dorothea was unrolled from the shawl and deposited on Louise's knee, who stretched out eager hands to receive her. The child was revealed as possessing dark downy hair and a rose-leaf complexion; one soft cheek was deeply flushed from resting against her mother's arm, and her eyes were closed in sleep. Unfortunately she was revealed also as wearing a cheap and dirty muslin frock, with her little feet encased in "gym" shoes so filthy that their original white was barely discernible. Louise removed these instantly, and running an exploring hand over the child's underwear, exchanged a glance of distress with her daughter. She then began, while Annice removed her dripping coat, to ruminate aloud on the question of beds for the visitors. Every possible shred of equipment owned by the Mellors which was suitable for babies had gone to Annice long before at the birth of her first child, and had, of course, not been returned, so that Louise was in a difficulty.

"I'll sleep with Lydia," announced Annice abruptly.

"Oh, certainly, dear," agreed the fluttered Louise. "But what about baby?"

"She'll sleep with me, of course," said Annice with an air of surprise. "She always does."

Louise, shocked, demurred at this as terribly unhygienic, but eventually was obliged to agree. Lydia, too, though a dark flush rose to her cheeks at the suggestion and she had to bite her lips to keep back an angry refusal to harbour

Annice and her child, did not see what else could be done, considering the lateness of the hour and the unexpectedness of their guest's arrival. No guest of the Mellors could be put between unaired sheets, and particularly no child. Nor, she reflected, could any guest of the Mellors be sent supperless to bed, and she rather stiffly offered Annice a meal. The younger woman accepted, saying that she seemed to have been travelling all day.

"Travelling?" queried Charles.

Annice observed with her customary effect of vagueness and reserve that she had been to Barnsley for the day, but she had told Eric not to meet her at the station next morning, so that would be all right. The Mellors puzzled over this in silence for a while, and each presently came to the same conclusion about Annice's meaning—Eric obviously thought his wife was spending the night at Barnsley with her relations, and Annice had deceived him and come to the Mellors instead. She must have had some definite purpose in so doing. Charles sighed, and lines of worry corrugated his fine brow. As Annice sat at the table eating he began to ply her gently with questions, not rude, pressing questions—Charles's standard of hospitality was much too high for that—but vague easy observations of an interrogative kind, which she could answer briefly or fully according to her inclination. He elicited the information that Eric was fairly well, that Bertie (the eldest child)

ell, and Jack (the second) very well, a sore finger. Dyson, whom she called it which for some reason Lydia rather as reported to be much as usual.

that mean, the Mellors wondered; s had thrown back his head to inquire was interrupted by Dorothea, who woke and cried as if her heart would

eyes were revealed as being a bright those of her mother; at present they xpression of pained and incredulous ie cried on a high, sustained, monoto- of rage; her small soft features were and tears stood on her rounded

the matter with her?" demanded arm, bending over Louise's lap to get a of these manifestations.

abt it's long past her bedtime," pro- harles oracularly.

with a muttered exclamation, swooped Louise and snatched up the child. er against her shoulder, she made for

ie same room you used to have, Miss ie demanded.

with her, Lydia, and put on the gas Louise.

obeyed, then came down again to grey shawl and the attaché-case. When ed, Annice had drawn up a low chair and was suckling her child. Lydia,

somewhat unnerved by this spectacle, so new to her, sat down abruptly and watched the operation. There was a smile of perfect happiness on Annice's face as she bent over her baby; and Dorothea, too, in the intervals when she paused for breath, raised her blue eyes to her mother's with a look of ecstasy. By the time the child was satisfied Lydia had fallen in love with her, and had forgiven her mother all her sins.

"She'll sleep now," said Annice comfortably, rearranging her dress. She drew the attaché-case to her with her disengaged hand and began to prepare the child for the night. Lydia drew nearer and looked on. Dorothea was sketchily attired in clothes which were in every case ill-fitting, often dirty, and sometimes torn; nor were her soft round limbs themselves in as perfectly clean and healthy a condition as was desirable.

"You don't keep your baby very nicely, Annice," said Lydia reproachfully, thinking how spotless *she* would have kept a child if Fate had vouchsafed her one.

"Well, I've no money to get her things," returned Annice sharply.

"No money!" cried Lydia, aghast. "What do you mean?"

"That's what I've come to see you about," said Annice. She rose and laid Dorothea gently in the bed. "Stay up here and talk to me," she added then abruptly, turning to Lydia. "I can tell you easier nor Mr. Mellor."

Lydia's heart sank—Annice's confidences had

proved so disastrous in the past that she had no wish to cope with them alone.

"What about the baby?" she suggested timidly. "Won't it wake her?"

"She'll be all right if I put the light out," replied Annice.

She suited the action to the word and returned to her chair by the fire, which glowed redly in the darkness. Lydia crouched down beside her, and ventured softly: "Isn't Eric kind to you?"

"Oh yes!" replied Annice in a tone of affectionate contempt. "He's *kind* all right. It isn't that." She paused, and added with immense sincerity, shaking her head: "It's a pity Mr. Wilfred ever went away."

Lydia jumped as though a red-hot needle had been driven through her nerves.

"What does that matter to you, Annice?" she gasped angrily.

Annice, in her usual jerky and inadequate style, began to tell her.

Lydia would remember, she said, the day of her wedding, when they all had that quarrel on the steps of Mr. Dyson's house. Lydia, with some bitterness, replied that she did. Well, explained Annice, it all began then. Mr. Dyson was furiously angry, so angry that he did himself an injury—a slight stroke it was, at least so the doctor said. Then on that day when he came to see Eric and Annice and the baby—Bertie, of course, she meant, not Dorothea—in Barnsley, he had another stroke.

"Another!" said Lydia. "How was that?"

Annice could hardly say. He didn't seem to like her mother's house much, she opined. There had come a knock at the door. She had been sitting by the fire feeding the baby, and Eric—who had just come in from his work and had his overalls on—was sitting beside her. Eric called out, "Come in!" and the door opened and Mr. Dyson appeared. They were so astounded that for a moment they could not speak, but sat silently looking at him, and Mr. Dyson muttered some sort of exclamation—he seemed angry—and then stumbled forward and sat down rather heavily in the rocking-chair. He looked ill, Annice thought, and seemed to breathe in a queer way; she wanted to make a cup of tea for him, but he would not hear of it. No! He wanted them to pack up and leave the house instantly. Instantly! He sent Eric out at once to fetch a taxi, and in less than an hour they were all driving away to the station. Eric had wanted to know how he had found them, and Mr. Dyson said: "From the notice in the paper, of course." Eric had been puzzled, but Annice guessed that Mr. Mellor had sent it—Mr. Mellor was always so good—though she did not say so to her father-in-law. It was better not, especially as he looked so queer just then. In the train he kept looking at one hand, feeling at it, as it were, as though it were stiff or something; and he said to Eric: "I don't feel so well. I reckon I've had another

stroke." Then Eric said: "Another?"—just as Lydia had done—and Mr. Dyson told them about the first one, and he finished up: "Yes, I reckon I've had another. Yon Annice of yours'll have to nurse me."

Annice looked impressively at Lydia as she finished this part of her tale, and Lydia gave an exclamation of pity for her uncle. Since the departure of Wilfred she had demanded and received from Charles the full story of Dyson's early life, and she felt she understood his second illness only too well. The house of Annice's mother stood, doubtless, in a squalid little row; and the room in which Mr. Dyson discovered his favourite son in overalls was probably a stuffy, untidy little place such as he had known only too well in his youth—dirty plates and mugs probably stood chaotically on the coverless table, and an indeterminate swarm of Annice's brothers and sisters, no doubt, squalled and tumbled about the floor. That after all his efforts to raise himself out of that squalor his son—Fanny's son—should come to this, was shock enough to make Mr. Dyson's illness quite understandable. No wonder he was bitter against those whom he considered responsible for Eric's marriage!

"Did he say anything about Wilfred?" queried Lydia.

"Oh yes," replied Annice in a tone of awe. "He went on about him terribly."

"Well, go on," Lydia urged her impatiently.

"Yon Annice of yours will have to nurse me," Mr. Dyson had said, and so, of course, Annice *did* nurse him. He was not, she said, looking stolidly at Lydia, like Mr. Mellor, of course. (Lydia guessed that her uncle was an extremely bad patient.) But still he was very kind to Annice, and wonderfully fond of the children—would do anything for them. He often nursed Dorothea, for instance, while Annice was busy about the house.

"Is he still ill now?" said Lydia in surprise.

"Oh yes!" replied Annice, her surprise at Lydia's question equalling Lydia's at her answer. "He keeps getting worse, you know. And so," she added in a tone of finality, as though she had now told the whole story, "he doesn't go to the mill much."

By this time Charles and Louise had surmised that the two young women were not coming down again, and had decided to retire themselves. They could be heard mounting the stairs; then Louise opened the door of Lydia's room with infinite precaution and inquired in a gentle whisper if the visitors had everything they wanted. On receiving an affirmative reply Louise withdrew; in a moment her door closed, and Lydia and Annice were left alone to their confidences.

"He must be very trying for you," said Lydia sympathetically, referring to her uncle.

Annice gave her a queer look, and explained that that wasn't the trouble—she didn't mind that. Averting her head, she then jerked out a

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string of short and ill-formed sentences which brought before Lydia's alarmed eyes a vivid picture of growing financial stress. The doctor had kept Dyson at home for a time, during which Eric, of course, was in charge of the business. Then, even when Dyson returned to work, he did not seem to have quite the same grasp of it as formerly; he forgot things and made mistakes, and business tired him, and so by slow degrees Eric was left more and more often in charge, until now Mr. Dyson never went near the mill at all. Consequently, for the whole of the past three years, as you might say, continued Annice, Boothroyd Mills had lost money and lost money, until now there seemed to be nothing left to live on, somehow. The car and the house-keeper had long since departed; the woodwork of Boothroyd House was cracking for want of paint, and even the furniture somehow had got shabby. In some ways it was a good thing that Mr. Dyson lived mostly in his bedroom nowadays; but of course his doctor's bills made a heavy item. There was an overdraft at the bank, too, which worried Eric a good deal. He could hardly sleep at nights for it, and Annice was right down sorry for him.

"But why has Eric let it get like that?" demanded Lydia indignantly.

"*He* can't help it," said Annice with complete tolerance. "Some people can't be good at business, however hard they try. Besides, there's been the slump."

"And does Uncle Herbert know how bad it is?" inquired Lydia.

Annice shook her head.

"Well! this is terrible, Annice!" said Lydia, overwhelmed. "But what good can *we* do? Nothing that my father has is enough to be of any real use."

"I thought you might write to Mr. Wilfred," brought out Annice, so promptly that this was obviously the real motive of her visit.

"Write to Wilfred!" cried Lydia bitterly. "I can't—I don't know his address."

"I do," said Annice. Lydia stared at her, her cheeks crimsoning. "That is, I know the firm he's with in Dumfries," pursued Annice. "A man who comes round to the mill told Eric—I think it was him who told Mr. Wilfred to go to Hawick, before."

"Then why don't you write to him yourself?" demanded Lydia in a fury. "You or Eric. I've nothing to do with the affair. It's no concern of mine at all. What would be the good of writing to him, in any case?"

"He might come home and manage the business, before it's too late," said Annice mildly. She rummaged about in the attaché-case and produced a crumpled piece of paper, which she held to the vague glow of the fire. "Yes, this is it," she said. "I wrote it down." She handed it to Lydia.

In spite of herself Lydia felt her heart beat fast as she bent to decipher Annice's large unformed scrawl.

"He might not be there now," she muttered, reading the address.

"The man would have told us if he'd moved," Annice reassured her. "He comes round regularly, you know."

"But why doesn't Eric write himself?" persisted Lydia.

"Oh, Eric wouldn't write," said Annice vaguely.

"Why not?" persisted Lydia again, arguing on principle against her own chance of happiness.

Annice sighed, as though daunted by the prospect of the explanation before her. Slowly and hesitatingly she then revealed to Lydia that Eric was jealous of Wilfred.

"Jealous!" cried Lydia, revolted. "How, pray?"

He always had been, Annice thought. Wilfred was so much cleverer in every way than Eric—at business, with the wireless, at all games, even at carving and little things like that. And Wilfred *managed* Eric. He *managed* him, she repeated.

"Well, it was for his own good," said Lydia hotly.

Oh, of course; Annice admitted that. Annice had nothing but good to say of Mr. Wilfred—nothing. She had a great deal to be grateful to Mr. Wilfred for, and she knew it. But even that, you see—that was when Eric's jealousy had really begun. Mr. Wilfred was always praising Annice to Eric and urging him to marry her, and Eric was irritated; he didn't see why his love affairs should be managed for him as well

as everything else. Then, that day when there was the quarrel on the steps, Annice had spoken up for Wilfred to Mr. Dyson—perhaps Lydia would remember. And that seemed to make Eric really angry. He had grumbled about it for long enough afterwards. In fact, even now, when they had a bit of a row about something, he would throw it up at her. He never could keep anything to himself, couldn't Eric, or else Annice was sure he would never have told her what the man said about Wilfred's address. Then, too, Annice would have been glad enough—for Lydia's sake, she hinted—to bring Mr. Dyson round to liking Wilfred again. For instance, once when Mr. Dyson was in bed he wanted the wireless made longer so that he could hear it in his bedroom, and Eric couldn't do it, and Mr. Dyson had grumbled and grumbled, and Annice had seized the opportunity to put in a word or two for Mr. Wilfred, saying that *he* could have done it easy. Well! Unfortunately Mr. Dyson had "gone on" about what she said to Eric, and Eric, instead of backing her up, had turned on her and made a dreadful scene, almost crying, and saying all manner of things against Mr. Wilfred; and Mr. Dyson had sat by, listening and nodding his head, well pleased, with all his angry notions about his eldest son confirmed.

Lydia sighed. "I'm sorry to hear that, Annice," she said in as disinterested a tone as she could command. "I hoped that in time those two would be friends again."

"Oh! they'll never be that, Miss Lydia," said Annice with conviction. "Mr. Dyson's got an idea in his head about Mr. Wilfred, and he'll never get it out again. At one time I used to say to him—whenever he seemed pleased, like, I used to say: 'Well, father, you wouldn't have had me for a nurse if it hadn't been for Mr. Wilfred.' But he didn't seem to follow it somehow, and now the doctor says we aren't to excite him by mentioning it. You see, Mr. Dyson isn't like he used to be, Miss Lydia," she concluded.

"How do you mean?" demanded Lydia.

Annice threw out a few details about Mr. Dyson's condition—his loss of weight, his troubled nights, his capricious appetite and confused speech—which brought before Lydia a vivid picture of a failing man.

"But if Eric is so against Wilfred," she said dubiously, "what's the good of sending for him? Won't Eric resent it?"

"If it was you who sent for him," Annice opined, "it would seem natural, you know." She paused, and added: "He'd be glad enough of Wilfred at the mill, I dare say."

A hot resentment flooded Lydia's heart. No doubt Eric *would* be glad enough to have his brother back, earning the Dysons' living for them, provided Eric were not required to sink his envious feelings and humble himself so far as to ask Wilfred to come. "I shan't write," she said in a determined tone.

"But Miss Lydia!" protested Annice at this,

opening her blue eyes wide, "if you don't we shall all be on the streets."

"Nonsense!" said Lydia firmly, in her best Tolefree style. "Eric must learn to manage better."

Annice shook her head slowly. "He never will," she said. "And there's the children."

At this Lydia's glance involuntarily turned towards the sleeping child. She sighed. "Well, let's go to bed," she suggested. "We can speak of it again in the morning."

Annice agreed, and the two women silently undressed and lay down beside Dorothea. Annice's calm regular breathing soon proclaimed her asleep, but Lydia lay awake for a long hour. She tried to debate within herself her respective duties to Wilfred and the other Dysons, but her mind would keep slipping back to the story of Annice's life during the past five years. Annice had three children, a jealously devoted husband who was daily sliding nearer bankruptcy, and an ailing father-in-law of a passionate and intractable disposition. How much life there seemed in the mere description of her circumstances! How much had happened to Annice in the past five years while Lydia had simply stood still and marked time! As long as Annice's life marched on without hindrance, it appeared, Lydia was doomed to quiet and inaction, but whenever disaster threatened she was called on to step out and take a part—some people, as she had observed on Annice's wedding-day, were born to live, and

others to make it possible for them to do so. She sighed, and moved her body restlessly—she was not fond of sleeping with a companion. Annice stirred, and Lydia lay still again; all that was beside the point, she told herself wearily; she must consider seriously the question of the recall of Wilfred. Would it be fair to him to ask him to return and take up the burden of providing for the Dyson family? Considering how little his father and Eric loved him, she rather doubted it. She brought all the force of the Tolefree conscience to bear on the question, but it was still undecided when at last she fell asleep.

The first few minutes after her awakening next morning, however, settled it for her. Dorothea, also, was emphatically awake. Chuckling and crowing, she climbed about the bed, banging her little fists on anything that came in handy, and crinkling up her eyes in a delicious smile as she paused to consider Lydia's unfamiliar face.

"Eric taught her that," explained Annice. "She copies him." She lifted the child horizontally above her head and mildly shook her, gazing up at her merrily the while and laughing in pure enjoyment. "She's lost weight lately," she continued, abruptly bringing the child down to her shoulder. "With one thing and another I've hardly had enough to eat, and it tells on her."

The horrified Lydia recognized the claims of the next generation by promising to write to Wilfred at once. After all, she reflected, if Eric became bankrupt and Boothroyd Mills were lost,

the Dyson family would inevitably come upon Wilfred for their keep; and with children in the case he could not refuse them help. It would be better for him, as well as for Dorothea and her brothers, that he should come back to Boothroyd Mills before, as Annice hinted, it was too late. That Eric was hopeless in business affairs, and that Annice was a careless and incompetent housekeeper, Lydia did not doubt; and her strong feeling that they both needed a Tolefree behind them to keep them straight caused her to exclaim:

"I wish I could come to see you sometimes, Annice."

Annice thought there was no reason why she shouldn't. It could easily be kept from Mr. Dyson, especially at night. He went to bed early, and when Annice had taken him up his bread and milk he usually didn't need her again. It would be best in any case for Lydia to bring Wilfred to the house when he arrived, because, as Annice put it, of Eric. It would be best for Eric to think that Wilfred's arrival was entirely due to Lydia; Annice's name must not be mentioned or there would be awful trouble. Lydia sighed, and promised to make this clear to Eric's brother.

Accordingly, when Annice and the child had gone—Lydia herself pinned Dorothea into her untidy shawl—Lydia sat down and wrote to Wilfred. Lydia was as good at business communications as she was bad at a love-letter, and she wrote such a concise, vivid, and telling statement of the Dyson case as no man with a conscience

could possibly resist. Dorothea's torn clothes and the unpainted Dyson lorries both went in to lend it added force. She could not honestly say that Annice looked the worse for the family misfortunes, for Annice's cheeks were as rosy, her hair as thick, and her eyes as bright as of old—desire gratified had sown its fruits of life and beauty in her—but Annice's hint that food was scarce in Boothroyd House was duly transmitted. "Father and I," concluded Lydia—she had told the sad history to Charles—"both think it your duty to return."

As she posted the letter her heart sang with hope and youth renewed, for surely Wilfred would be with them soon.

2

Wilfred's return was, as it turned out, arranged very simply and with a minimum of friction. In reply to Lydia's letter Wilfred wrote with great cordiality and good feeling, thanking her for letting him know the parlous state of affairs at Boothroyd Mills. It troubled him very much, he said, to think of Eric's children not being brought up as they should be, and of his father being ill and uncared for. If Eric wanted him, he would certainly return. To Eric he wrote a long letter beginning, "Lydia says . . ." which went on to sketch the history of the Dyson family during the past five years as outlined by Lydia—Annice's name was not mentioned in this con-

nection, Lydia having attributed her information entirely to rumour—and ended with an offer to come back at once and help to get things right again, if Eric thought that would be useful. Eric at that time was in a state almost of hysteria between the ultimatums of the bank, the impossibility of paying his weekly wages bill without their help, and the complaints of his intensely exasperated customers. Spurred on skilfully by Annice, who took the attitude that Wilfred's return would be a nuisance which perhaps it would be best to put up with for the children's sake, and frightened in the same direction by Charles, who called at the mill to deliver a moral harangue on debt and bankruptcy, Eric suddenly flung himself out of the house one night in a state of great excitement and positively sent a prepaid telegram to his brother begging him to return at once. He was so exalted by his brother's affirmative reply next morning that Annice was in terror lest Mr. Dyson should hear his transports. (Eric himself had pointed out to her the importance of keeping his father in ignorance of Wilfred's return; for as Eric had never been made formally a director of the business, if Dyson chose to be angry and refuse to sign cheques and other such documents, Boothroyd Mills could not be carried on.) Fortunately, Mr. Dyson was in one of his uneasy dozes at the time, and heard nothing of Eric's joy. A few weeks elapsed, while Wilfred arranged his affairs at Dumfries, Eric put off every difficulty till his

brother should come, Lydia became rejuvenated by hope, and all parties wrote each other numerous letters; then at last, one spring evening, Charles and Lydia and Eric stood on the Hudley platform together and Wilfred arrived.

Lydia's heart beat so fast, as the train came in, that she felt as though she would choke. For a moment no glimpse could be caught of Wilfred, and an overwhelming disappointment filled her breast; then his familiar voice suddenly sounded, rather brusque and cross, behind Charles's back, and she knew he was really there. In her joy she could not raise her eyes to his, and she remained gazing down at the stones of the platform, silent and inert, till Charles urged her kindly: "Say something to welcome Wilfred, Lydia." Then she raised her eyes, but she might as well have kept them down, for she could see nothing for tears. She managed to stretch out her hand, however, and said in timid and schoolgirlish tones: "I'm very glad you're back, Wilfred. We've all missed you very much."

"Aye! Well!" said Wilfred, shaking her hand warmly, "I've missed you all, too. It was silly of me not to answer Uncle Charles's letters, but I was sore, you know, about father. Besides, I never was much of a hand at letters."

He turned to speak to a porter about his bag, and the party moved off up the stairs together. Lydia marvelled at the ease with which the world could be righted. Just two or three sentences and a pressure of the hand, and the universe was in

flower. She felt a strong desire to burst into hysterical weeping, and her face worked convulsively; but eventually her expression settled itself into an idiotic smile of happiness—she smiled at the porters, the barrier, the clock, the cold February rain which was hurtling to the earth, finally at Wilfred himself when she found herself seated opposite him in the taxi which was to take them all out to Ribourne. Making an effort, she composed her demeanour to one nearer her customary sobriety; and while Charles explained to Wilfred that of course he was to stay the night with them—he could have a long chat with Eric after supper—she examined her returned lover in shy sidelong glances. He looked, she decided, a very much older man than he had done five years ago. He seemed shorter and broader; his shoulders were very square, his neck thick. His features were heavier and bolder, altogether more strongly marked, than of old; and there was a deep vertical cleft, the result evidently of a habitual frown, in the centre of his forehead. His complexion was more like Dyson's than she remembered it. He was turning his hat about in his hands, and his strong dark hair was seen to be thicker than ever, with here and there a stray thread of grey. Altogether Lydia decided that he was a tower of strength and that she was really rather afraid of him; he was no longer a pleasant young fellow, but a determined man, one who would stand no nonsense and who had a sound idea of his own worth. Just now he was

barking out a few business questions which made the hapless Eric colour and wince.

"Let us leave that till after supper, Wilfred," suggested Charles soothingly, congratulating himself on having arranged that the brothers' interview should take place within reach of his own mollifying influence.

"As you like, Uncle Charles," returned Wilfred. "We shall have to go through it some time, I suppose, and the sooner the better. How's father?" he demanded abruptly, turning to Eric.

"Oh, much the same," said Eric, squirming uneasily in his corner. "He's been in bed this week, but got up to-day for a bit."

"Who looks after him when he's ill?" asked Wilfred.

"Annice," replied Annice's husband.

Wilfred's grunt sounded rather disapproving, and Lydia put in hastily: "Uncle Herbert is very fond of Annice nowadays, Wilfred."

"Well, as I remember her she was a very good-natured girl," said Wilfred. "But with three children and an invalid I should think she's got her work cut out."

"Annice is all right," said Eric at this sulkily.

"Well! I shall like to see the children," observed Wilfred. He smiled, and his face became pleasantly softened. "Fancy you with three children, Eric!" he said.

Eric, flattered, expatiated fondly on his children's charms, appealing to Lydia, who had

been to Boothroyd House once or twice in the last month, for corroboration. Lydia, in her desire to make things pleasant, spoke more heartily than she felt; she loved Dorothea, but was not greatly enamoured of Bert and Jack, who seemed to her to be rough and loutish individuals even at their present tender age, with hearty bodies certainly, but heavy faces and slow minds. She spun the subject out, however, till they arrived at Ribourne. Then there was Louise to greet, and the new house to see, and supper to eat, so that awkward subjects were avoided until Wilfred had finished his pipe and retired with Eric—who looked pale and miserable and carried a sheaf of papers—into Charles's study at the back of the house.

The interview did not seem to be a very soothing one. From time to time Wilfred could be heard ejaculating "Nay!" in accents of astounded incredulity, and Eric certainly had two, if not more, rounds of tears. When they had been alone for some two hours Charles put his head in and asked in bland, cheerful tones whether they had now settled all the affairs of the nation. Wilfred, from a position on the hearthrug, replied that they had.

"It's a good thing I've come back, Uncle Charles, I'm thinking," he observed rather grimly.

Poor Eric, who was sitting by the table fidgeting with his papers and looking rather as though he had been having a stiff time at a dentist's, gave

a subdued groan at this, and Wilfred's heart seemed to be touched.

"Well, never mind, lad," he said kindly, laying a hand on Eric's shoulder. "It can't be helped now. It's no use crying over spilt milk. I suppose it isn't really your fault, though why you ever——" He broke off, and repeated: "Well, never mind. I shall have to try and see if I can pull things round, though it won't be easy. It won't be easy," he concluded thoughtfully. "I doubt I shall be poorer, for a long while, than I have been these last three years in Scotland."

"You'll have the consciousness that you have done your duty," Charles told him in his best pulpit style.

Wilfred gave a thoughtful sniff and said nothing.

For the next month or two everything in Lydia's world went splendidly, except that Wilfred was reluctantly obliged to give up the idea of living at Ribourne with the Mellors. He couldn't get to the mill before breakfast from out there, he said; and as that was simply essential he took lodgings in Hudley, so as to be near at hand. His evenings, too, seemed to be pretty well occupied with figures and interviews, but he spent his Sundays definitely with the Mellors, and could usually be found in their house on Saturdays for tea. As Messrs. Herbert Dyson were not yet bankrupt, presumably he was managing to "pull things round," though he always frowned darkly when Charles asked him

how he was getting on, shook his head, and muttered that they would all have to live on a workman's wage for a long time yet. His father remained in complete ignorance of his presence in Hudley; so much so, indeed, that Wilfred began to venture to spend an occasional evening at Boothroyd House and presently went there regularly every Wednesday. On these occasions Lydia was usually invited too. Lydia, indeed, in one way or another contrived to see a good deal of Wilfred at this time, and it reacted on her whole personality. She discarded her glasses, adopted a new style for her hair, and reformed her dress, venturing into modern fashions with increasing boldness. Her blood ran more swiftly beneath her olive skin, and restored to it some of its lost youthful freshness; her eyes sparkled, her hair regained its lustre; her acidity of speech was gone; she laughed often and heartily, sang to herself about the house, and woke every morning feeling that something really jolly was sure to happen that day. Her painful feeling of inferiority to girls who were lucky in their love affairs was gone; she beamed benevolently upon them, and reflected that the world was made for love. Soon it would be spring; though hail still threw itself fiercely to earth in showers of fascinating white pellets, the birds were already singing, tiny green shoots dotted the Mellors' three feet of front garden, and the shop windows were a riot of white lilac, mimosa, daffodils, violets, anemones, and richly coloured tulips. Lydia's heart awoke

and sang with the birds, bloomed with the flowers. Of course, her love could not be quite the same as it had been before in Cromwell Place; they were both older, and Wilfred's common sense, more strongly developed than ever, effectually prevented rhapsody; but Lydia was content with it as it was. Spring was coming, summer would follow; the long winter of her life was over.

VI

CATASTROPHE

I

UNFORTUNATELY a jarring note in this spring song was shortly struck by Annice. In the month preceding Wilfred's arrival Lydia had not failed to observe and admire Annice's constant kindness and affection towards Eric—whose remarks, behaviour, and character in general were enough to try a saint—and towards Dyson, whose failing health made him extremely querulous and exacting. Annice never lost patience with either of them, but spoke to them as she would to a couple of children, and humoured their caprices with a large, amused, detached tolerance which was really very fine. Lydia, looking in—with precaution—round Mr. Dyson's bedroom door, observed her uncle's wasted form with pity and admired Annice heartily as she wrapped him up in shawls and seated him in his arm-chair, or read the headlines of the paper to him, or coaxed him to eat the milk foods he detested. Her nursing was not, of course, that of a Tolefree; Mr. Dyson received his medicine at the oddest hours, and his toilet was not performed with that perfection

which Lydia thought necessary; but there was no doubt that Annice knew how to make her patient happy. As for Eric, her influence over him was so complete and so profound that Lydia could not but marvel. She could excite him to tears or soothe him to a smile by one glance from her blue eyes; he obviously adored her, and she responded to his adoration by merry smiles and good-humoured exclamations which Lydia found rather attractive. At the time of Wilfred's arrival Annice was tactfulness itself, conveying the impression that Eric wanted Wilfred at home, and so, of course, Eric's wife dutifully acquiesced in this arrangement. But no sooner had Wilfred really set to work, no sooner had the Dysons' situation really improved, than all this was changed, and the perverse creature—as Lydia called her with a sigh—began to neglect Dyson and be peevish with Eric. She had always spoken to her husband in tones of kindly amusement, of jocular and as it were contemptuous affection; but now the amusement, the jocular, and the affection had gone, while the contempt in rather too marked a fashion remained. The change in her behaviour to Dyson was no less marked. One afternoon Lydia called at Boothroyd House with some fresh country eggs as a present for Dyson. (Though Charles would not enter the house himself, and was much troubled at the deception of his brother-in-law on which the present situation rested, he allowed Lydia to go there in order to gain news, and often sent presents by

her; for his love for his old friend was undiminished, and Herbert's illness was a great grief to him.) On this occasion Lydia rang the bell and, receiving no reply, tried the door-handle, with the intention of depositing the eggs in the hall if Annice was engaged upstairs. The door yielded to her touch; she went in, and was startled to hear a bell pealing through the house. After a while it stopped, and Dyson's stick thumped on the floor above her head; then, when this too proved ineffectual, the bell pealed out again. Lydia, perplexed and disturbed, inspected the downstairs rooms; the three children were playing in the kitchen, but Annice was invisible. The bell continued to ring, and Lydia bade Bertie go upstairs and see what his grandfather required. The child had hardly gone, however, before the back door was flung open, and Annice, flushed and breathless, ran in. It seemed to Lydia that a shade passed over Annice's face as she saw her visitor. She began to explain at once, with what seemed to Lydia unnecessary haste: "I was just showing the man where to put the wood." Lydia glanced out of the window and saw Messrs. Herbert Dyson's lorry drawn up in the back yard; a man with a load of wood on his back was just entering the disused garage.

"Where's Bertie?" demanded Annice, looking round.

Lydia explained, and just then the child came back to say that grandpa wanted to see Evan.

"Well, he can't," said Annice snappishly.

Bertie, astonished, raised his heavy eyelids and said that grandpa had seen the lorry in the yard from his window, and wanted to talk to Evan.

"Well, he can't," repeated Annice with decision. "Go into the dining-room, Lydia, and I'll make you some tea."

She almost pushed the dismayed Lydia from the room.

On the following Wednesday, when the Dysons and Lydia were collected round the fire at Boothroyd House, Wilfred observed that he wished they could afford to keep a nurse for his father. (Wilfred had seen his father once while he was asleep, was distressed by the change in him and very earnest for his comfort.)

"Couldn't you find some woman who would come and sit with him a bit, Annice?" he suggested.

Annice raised her eyes and glowered at him.

"Why?" she demanded sullenly. "What does he want a woman for?"

"It's not suitable for him to be left in the house alone," said Wilfred, "and of course you're obliged to leave him sometimes, Annice."

"I never leave him," threw out Annice in a sombre tone.

A dark flush spread over Wilfred's face, and he said no more. Lydia surmised that he had had an experience similar to her own; and as they left the house together that night she discovered that it was so. He had twice called at night and been

unable to get any answer. Inquiries next revealed that Eric had been to a Mr. Annice, however, was supposed to have been at Boothroyd House.

"It isn't good enough, Lydia," said Wilfred in conclusion. "Here they expect me to work, and they take pretty well all the time; of course I don't object to that; Eric's a man with a family, and there's father, and mother, and all—but I do think they might treat father decently. I get pretty sick of it; I can tell you. It's no sort of a life for me; it won't be for two or three years yet. I had a job in Scotland, you know; it wasn't a life for me to leave it."

"*We* know how good you are, Wilfred," said Lydia with fervour, feeling that he was saying to her that they could not marry as yet.

"If it wasn't for you and Uncle Wilfred, I shouldn't stay," muttered Wilfred. "Even as it is I don't feel as though I could stand it."

"Oh, Wilfred!" exclaimed Lydia in distress. "Don't say that. Don't, don't!"

Wilfred growled, but seemed somewhat appeased. From that time onward, however, he tentatively returned to the subject often, too, he urged Eric to go up and see his father himself. This was unfortunate while to Lydia and Annice it showed enough Wilfred's distrust of Annice, seemed as though his brother thought

ill-treated and overworked, and this maddened him. His jealous love for Annice could brook no interference, and his irritation against his brother was naturally very much increased by the treatment he was receiving from Annice herself. To Lydia, therefore, Annice's neglect of Dyson and coldness to Eric, bad enough in themselves, seemed really appalling in their wanton and destructive perversity, because they threatened the friendly relations between Wilfred and Eric, on which she had such an enormous stake—her whole life's happiness.

Just now, for instance, her heart had contracted painfully. The three Dysons and Lydia herself were seated round the dining-table in Boothroyd House, just finishing supper, when an angry thumping from above showed that Mr. Dyson required attention. Annice rose rather slowly to go to him, and Wilfred said with some irritation: "Why don't *you* go to father, Eric? You never go." At this Annice observed contemptuously that it was no use *Eric* going; if he went he wouldn't be any use; she'd have to go herself in the end, anyhow. As might be imagined, this did not tend to smooth either Wilfred's or Eric's brow. Wilfred frowned and seemed about to make some critical remark; Eric coloured, shot an angry glance at his brother, and left the room in a pet. While he was absent all three were silent, abandoning themselves to reflections, of which, to judge by the expressions on their faces, Annice's alone seemed pleasant. When Eric

returned he left the door, as usual, open. Annice, without looking at him, briefly bade him shut it. Her tone was so peremptory as to be really insulting, but Eric meekly obeyed without a word of expostulation, as though he were used to being addressed like that.

"Father had heard our voices," he explained, returning to his place at the table, "and wanted to know who was here. I told him it was Evan."

Annice started and seemed annoyed. "That was silly," she observed in a scathing tone. "He'll be wanting to see him next."

"Say I *am* silly, then," threw out Eric, colouring angrily. "What's it matter to you, Annice?"

"A good deal," returned Annice with emphasis. Lydia looked at her with a smile, expecting to see an answering smile on her lips, but the younger woman's face was sombre, and her eyes were cast down. Disconcerted, Lydia turned to Eric and inquired: "Who *is* Evan?"

"He drives the lorry at the mill," explained Wilfred rather impatiently. "Though goodness only knows why Eric took him on."

"He's a good driver," contended Eric peevishly.

"Good enough," conceded Wilfred. "But the other man had been with father twenty years or more; he knew every firm in the place and was as good as a traveller for us. However, it's done now, along with a lot of other things. But what should father want to see Evan for, Annice?" he continued with a disapproving air.

